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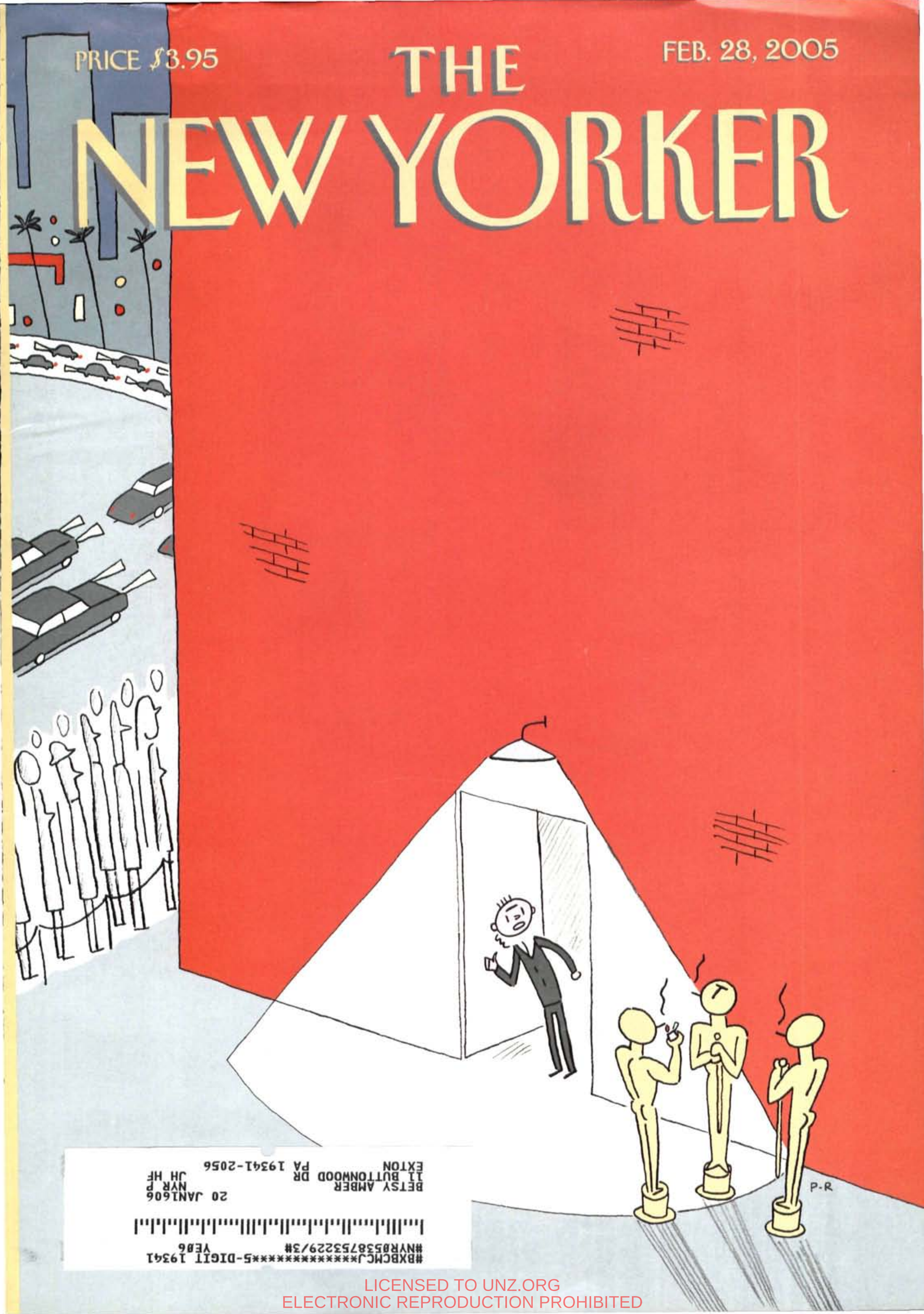
FEB. 28, 2005

THE NEW YORKER



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Fidelity Strategic Income Fund†	★★★★★ *Among 118 Multisector Bond Funds*	9.44%	9.50%	8.05%

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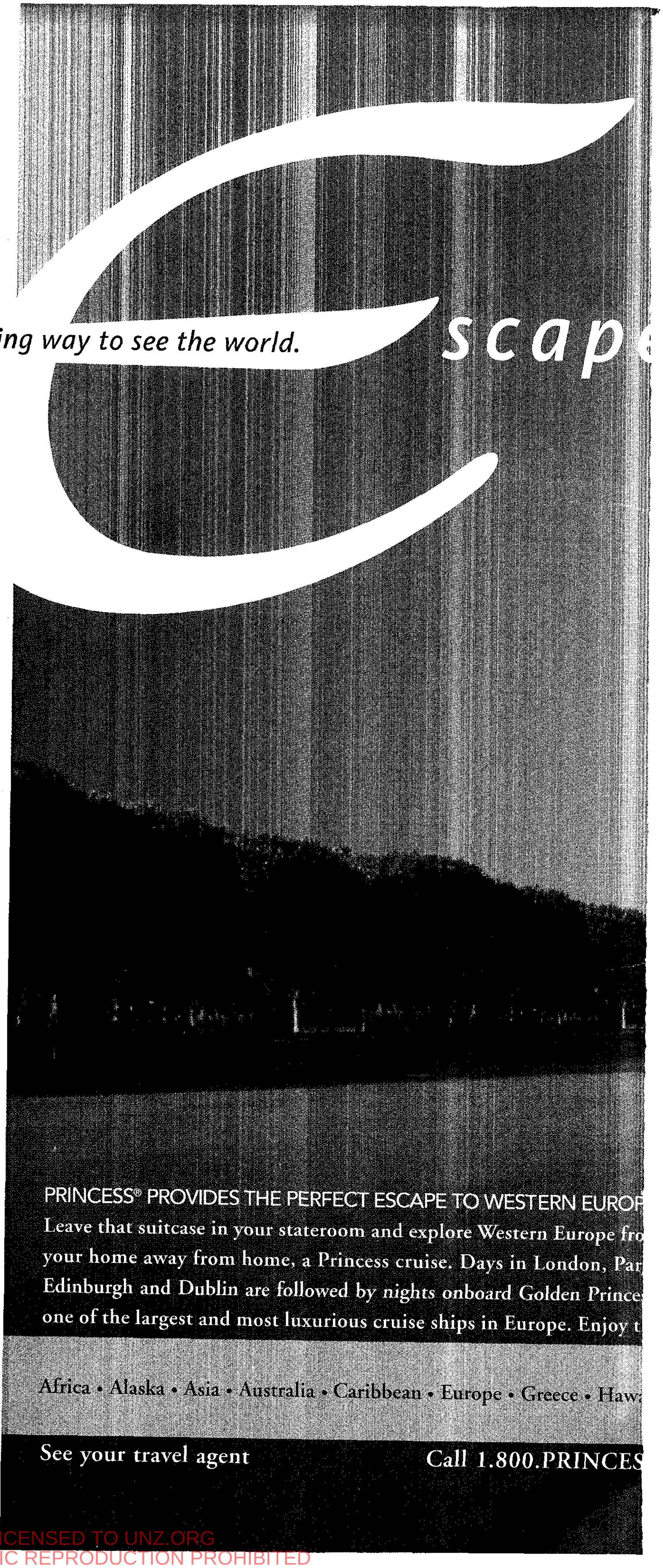

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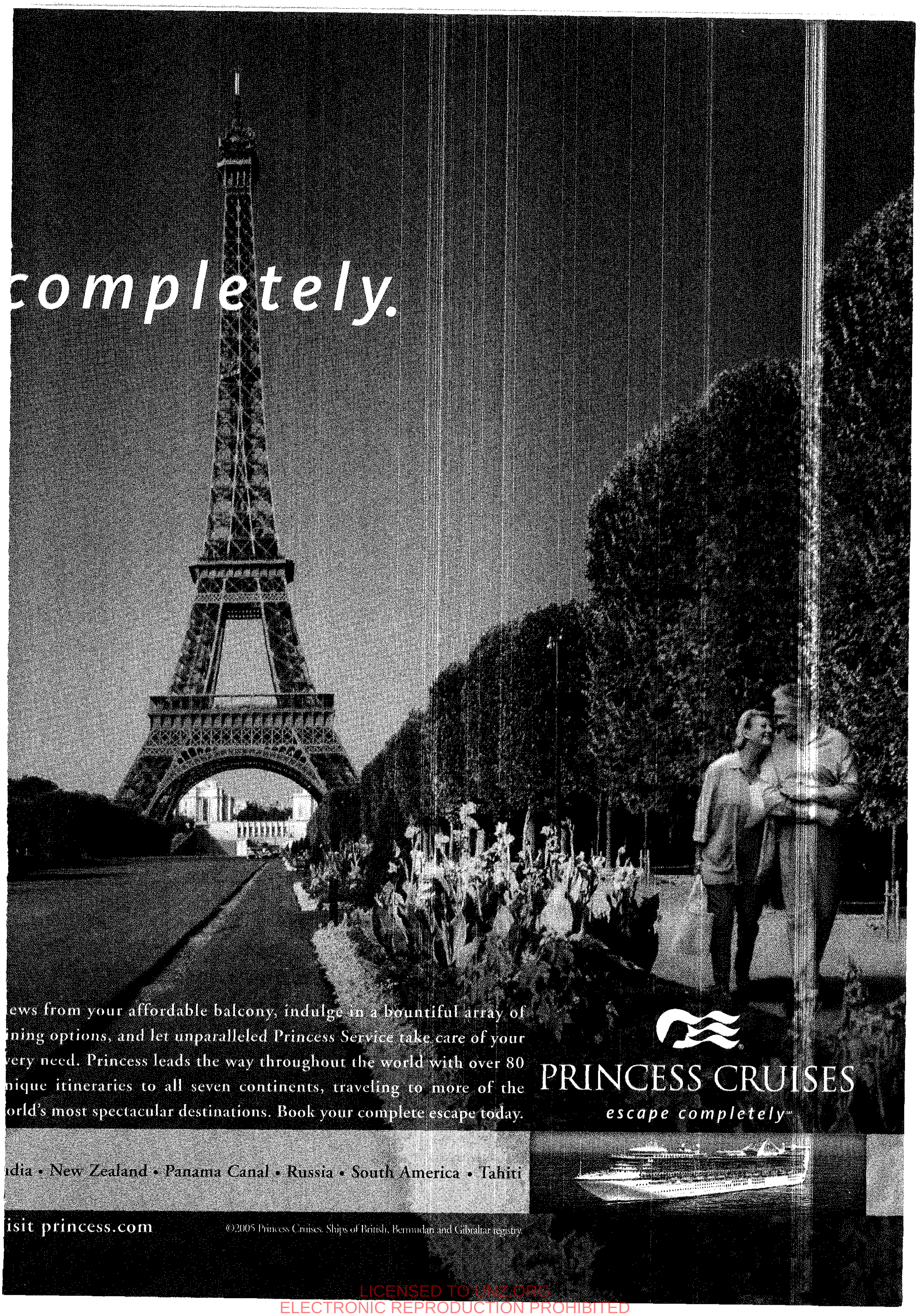

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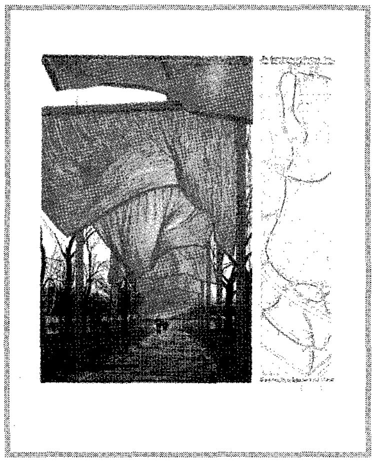

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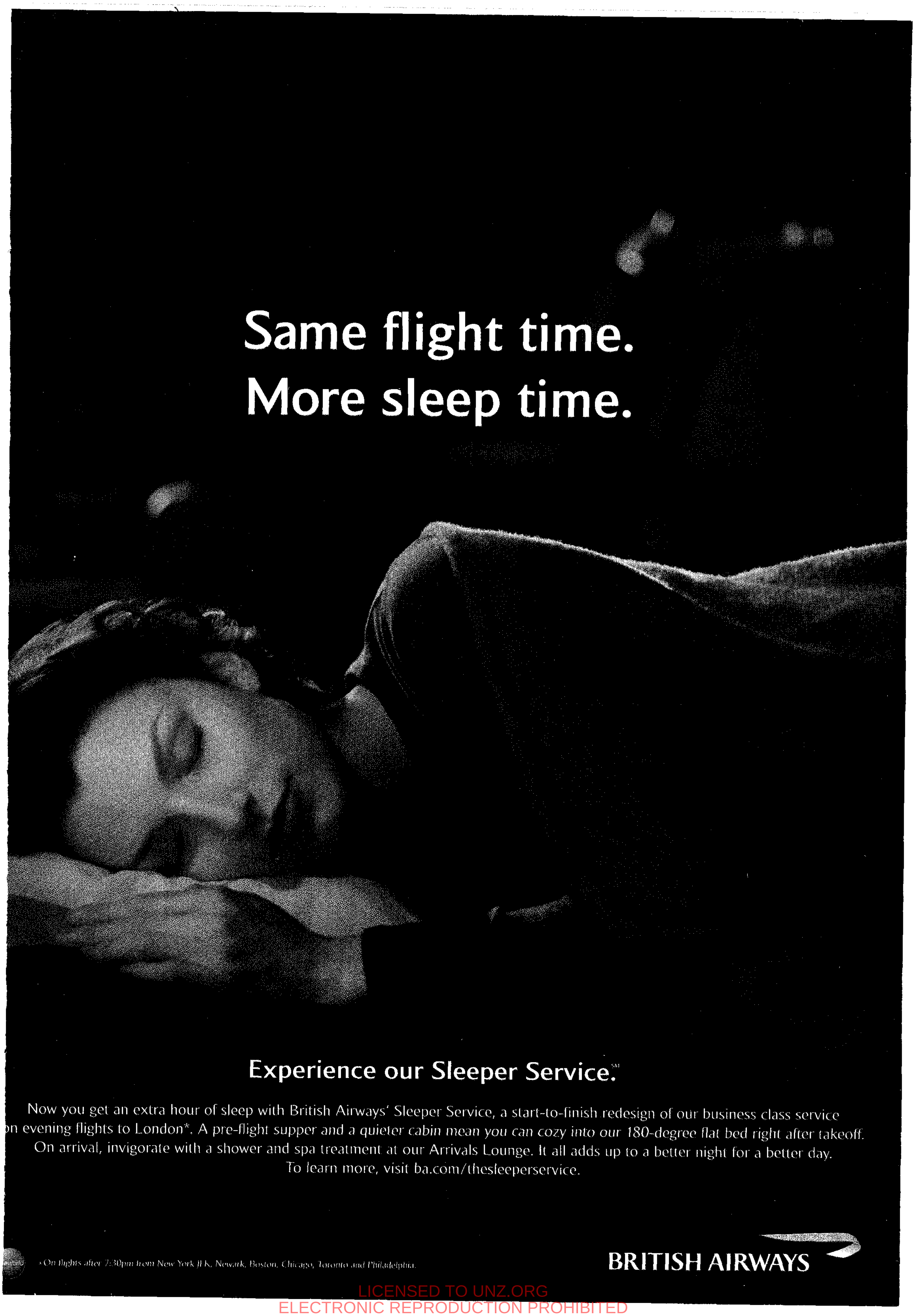
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CONTRIBUTORS

George Packer ("Testing Ground," p. 36) is working on a book about the Iraq war, "The Assassin's Gate," which will be published in the fall.

Hendrik Hertzberg (Comment, p. 29) is a senior editor and a staff writer. His book "Politics: Observations & Arguments, 1966-2004" came out last summer.

Peter Schjeldahl (The Talk of the Town, p. 30) is the magazine's art critic.

Ian Frazier (Shouts & Murmurs, p. 46) will publish a collection of his pieces about New York City, "Gone to New York," in November.

Jacques de Loustal (Illustration, p. 51) is an illustrator and artist. He lives in Paris.

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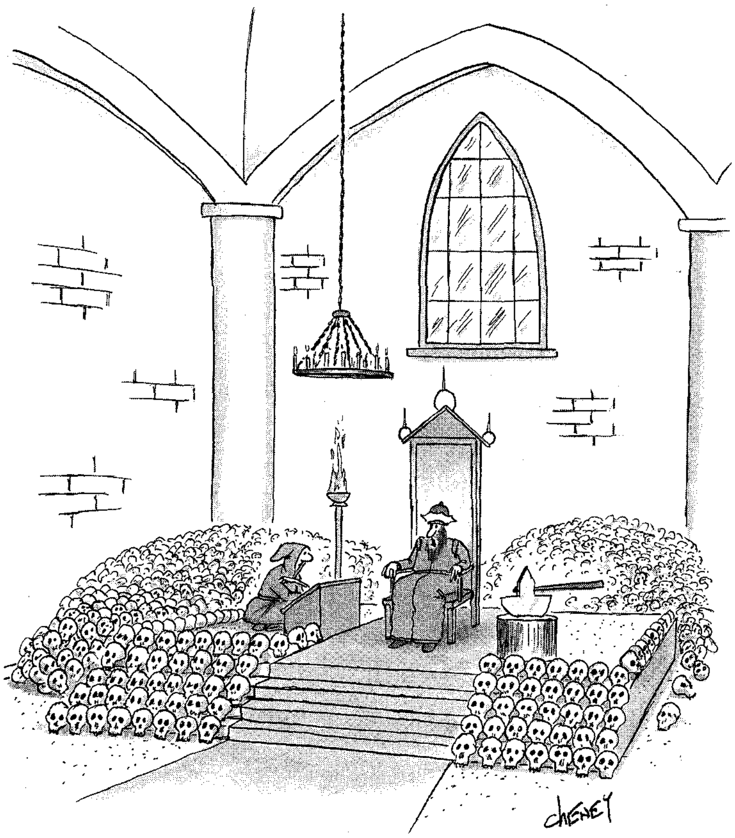
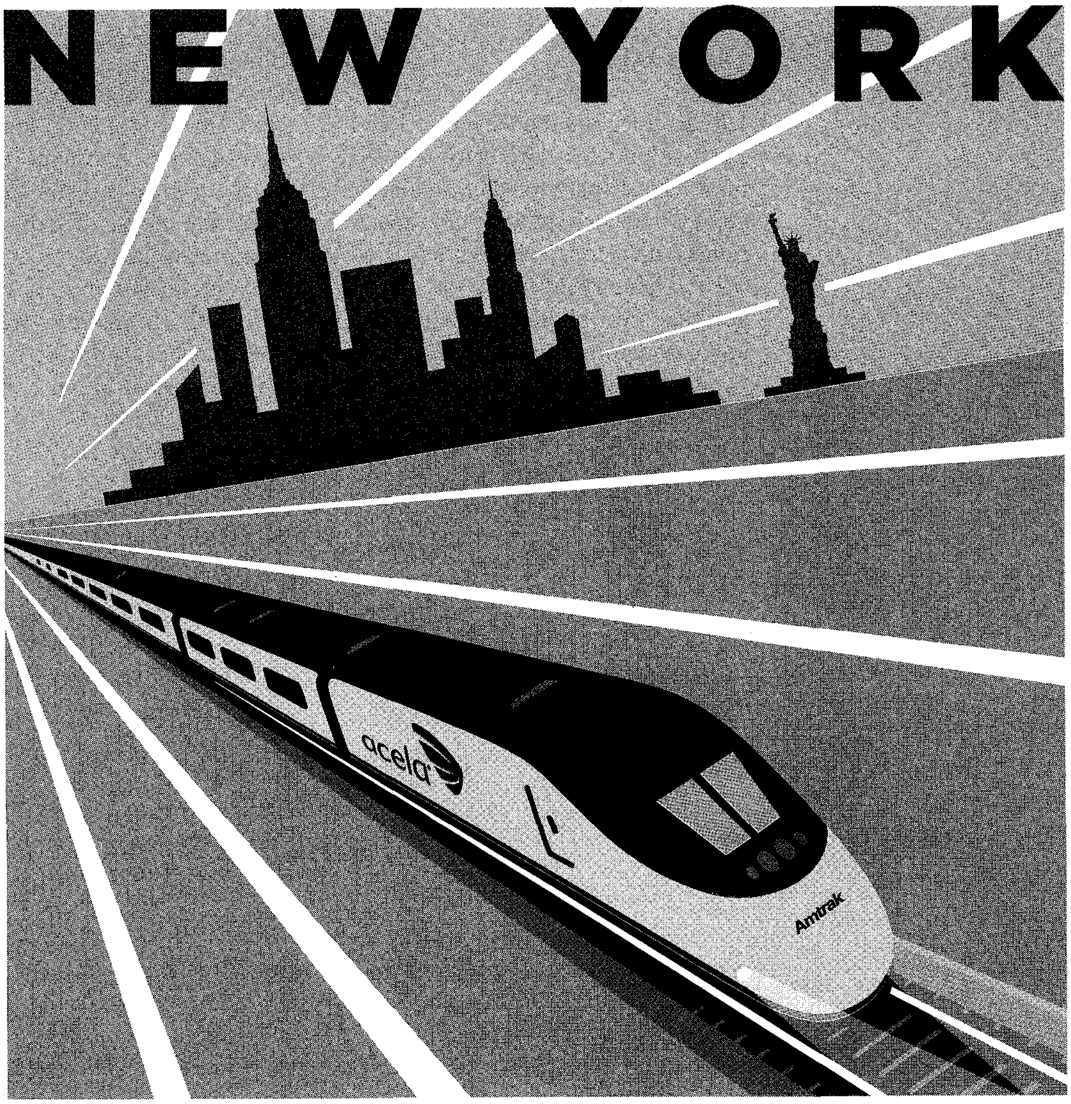


"My antidepressant made me do it."



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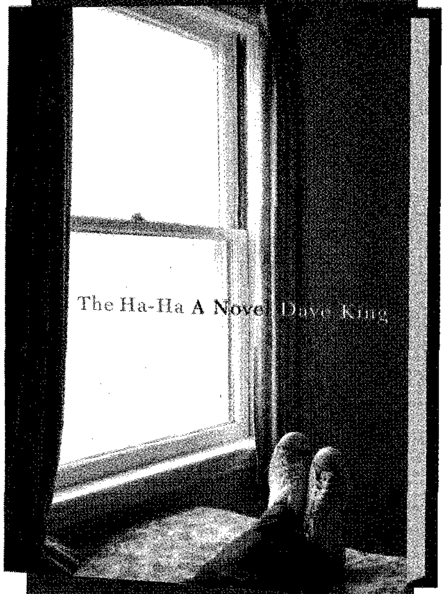
—Anna Quindlen



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OUTFOXED

Jane Kramer airs the view that Labour Party supporters' opposition to foxhunting is, in part, retribution for Margaret Thatcher's stand against the coal miners in the nineteen-eighties ("Blood Sport," January 24th & 31st). To suggest that these political objectives are in any way commensurate is hard to justify. Coal mining was a national industry supporting, at the time of the strike, many thousands of full-time workers, and it provided an essential resource to all sectors of the British economy. Currently, Britain's greatly limited domestic production of coal—combined with dwindling North Sea oil reserves and the high cost of nuclear power—leaves the country essentially without a viable energy policy. By comparison, the long-term consequences of abolishing foxhunting seem trivial.

Ellen Leopold
Cambridge, Mass.

Kramer makes reference to plans by those who oppose the forthcoming hunting ban to appeal under the European Convention on Human Rights. However, although the Convention has recently been integrated into U.K. law—with the Human Rights Act 1998—its influence on acts of Parliament falls far short of, say, the sweeping power given American courts to invalidate acts of Congress. As Kramer notes, hunt proponents are unlikely to win a judgment in their favor. But, even if they did, the likely effect of such a judgment is far from clear.

Christopher P. Schuller
Pembroke College, Oxford
United Kingdom

Kramer's tragicomic account of England's fuss over foxhunting makes clear that concern over animal rights is no more than a cover for class warfare. Those Labour backbenchers will go after all upper-class customs until the country is reduced to deadening uniformity. It is a relief to realize that it can't happen in the United States. In establishing the Senate, our founding fathers provided overrepresentation to relatively underpopulated states—a bulwark against tyranny of the majority which seems to work fairly well. In England, the House of Commons represents predominantly urban constituencies, and feels compelled to convert their enthusiasms into law. Here, the blue states cannot tell the citizens of Wyoming or Montana how to conduct their lives.

Richard H. Howarth
Reston, Va.

ORCHESTRAL COMPOSITION

Charles Michener, in his article on the Cleveland Orchestra, qualifies his references to the "Big Five"—the orchestras of Cleveland, New York, Philadelphia, Boston, and Chicago—and concedes that to rank symphony orchestras is "more sport than science" ("The Clevelanders," February 7th). All the same, calling Cleveland "the most 'European' of the American orchestras" seems questionable. The history of American symphony orchestras in the twentieth century was very largely a story of European diaspora, assimilation, and influence. When I joined the orchestra of the Metropolitan Opera forty-three years ago, I heard less English spoken by the musicians around me than Italian, German, and French. As for the Met Orchestra's current standing, while it may not rank among the "Big Five" its Carnegie Hall concerts invariably get fine reviews from the toughest New York critics, several of whom have gone so far as to rank it as one of the finest in the world.

Les Dreyer
New York City

●

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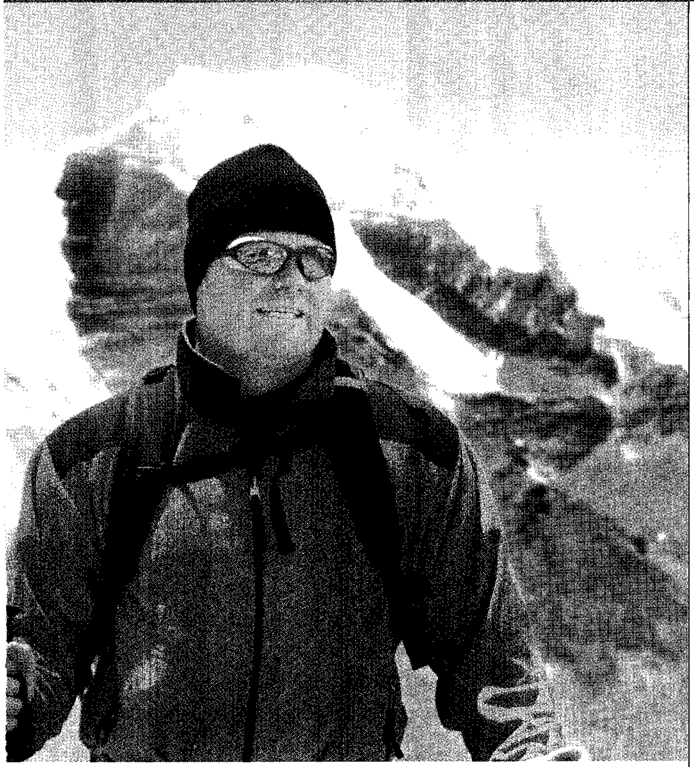

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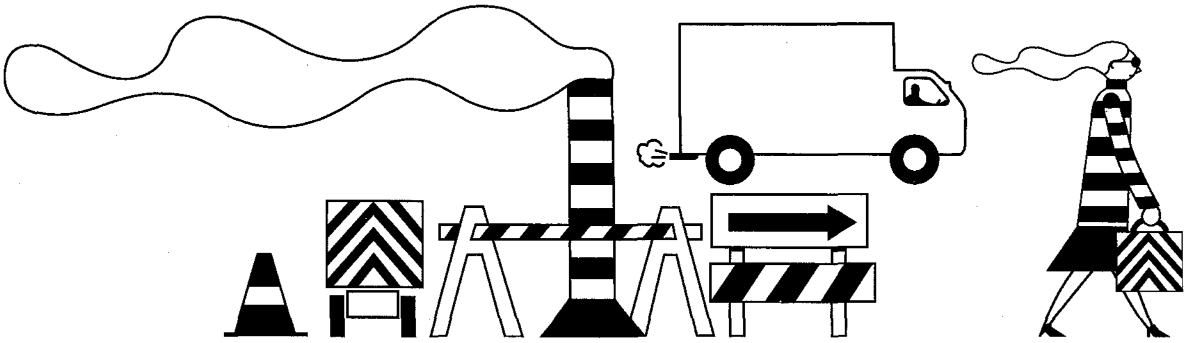

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THIS WEEK

TAYLOR MADE

In the five decades since the Paul Taylor Dance Company made its début, the choreographer has amassed a repertory that's unmatched both in diversity of tone (innocent, cynical, disturbing, silly) and in consistency of dazzling invention. For its three-week, fiftieth-anniversary season at City Center, the troupe had no problem coming up with a greatest-hits program of seventeen classics and a couple of new works. The most recent pieces—the knotty ritual "Dante Variations" and the rueful-sweet hoedown "Klezmerbluegrass"—show that, at seventy-four, the dancemaker has undiminished imagination. (March 1; see Dance.)

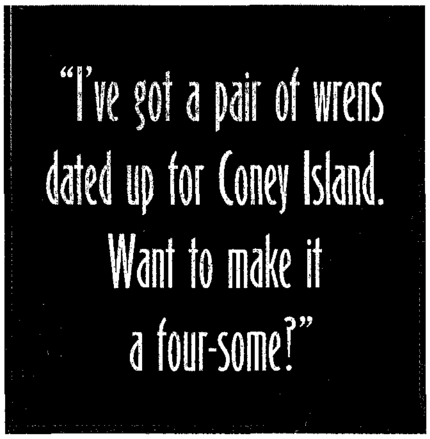
BLOWING IN THE WIND

The not quite prolific John Corigliano has chosen to write his Symphony No. 3 for an orchestra without strings—the University of Texas Wind Ensemble, one of a number of front-rank collegiate bands whose directors have doggedly pursued major composers to write for them. The work, subtitled "Circus Maximus," will take full advantage of the group's crackling virtuosity and Carnegie Hall's magnificent acoustics; Jerry Junkin conducts it, along with classics by Handel and Copland. (Feb. 27; see Classical Music.)

OSCAR'S PAST

The Academy Awards' first year, 1927, is being celebrated this week at Film Forum with screenings of sixteen films. Emil Jannings, who won Best Actor, is represented by "The Lost Command" and "The Way of All Flesh" (only an eight-and-a-half-minute fragment of the latter film remains). Other films include F. W. Murnau's "Sunrise," which received the first and only Unique & Artistic Production Award, and King Vidor's New York-set domestic drama "The Crowd," which won for Best Title Writing, a category that became obsolete with the rise of the talking picture. (Starts Feb. 25; see Movies.)

Paul Taylor Dance Company's fiftieth-anniversary season, at City Center.



"I've got a pair of wrens dated up for Coney Island. Want to make it a four-some?"

A tribute to the Academy Awards' first year, at Film Forum.

JOHN RITTER

The University of Texas Wind Ensemble, at Carnegie Hall.

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AFTER ASHLEY
A troubled teen (Kieran Culkin) becomes a national celebrity, in a new play by Gina Gionfriddo that skewers the media's glorification of tragedy. Anna Paquin costars. Directed by Terry Kinney. In previews. Opens Feb. 28 at 8. (Vineyard, 108 E. 15th St. 212-353-0303.)

THE BINDLESTIFF FAMILY CIRKUS
The neo-vaudevillian troupe comes to Theatre for the New City for a six-week run, with the new show "From the Gutter to the Glitter: A Night Out with the Bindlestiffs" and, on Thursday nights only, performances of its acclaimed cabaret act. Opens Feb. 24 at 8. (155 First Ave., at 10th St. 212-352-0255.)

THE CONTROVERSY OF VALLADOLID
A new work by the French playwright Jean-Claude Carrière explores the debate in the Catholic Church in the sixteenth century on the question of whether the indigenous peoples of the Americas were human. Translated by Richard Nelson and directed by David Jones. Opens Feb. 27 at 7. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-239-6200.)

DESSA ROSE
Sherley Anne Williams's antebellum-era novel about a friendship between a runaway slave (LaChanze) and an abandoned wife (Rachel York) has become a musical, with book and lyrics by Lynn Ahrens and music by Stephen Flaherty. Choreographed and directed by Graciela Daniele. In previews. (Mitzi Newhouse, Lincoln Center. 212-239-6200.)

DIRTY ROTTEN SCOUNDRELS
John Lithgow, Norbert Leo Butz, and Sherie Rene Scott star in a musical based on the Steve Martin and Michael Caine film about con men. Created by David Yazbek (music and lyrics), Jeffrey Lane (book), and Jerry Mitchell (choreography). Directed by Jack O'Brien. In previews. (Imperial, 249 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

THE END OF THE MOON
This solo work by Laurie Anderson, inspired by her artist residency at NASA, is set to an original violin-and-electronics score. Lighting by Jennifer Tipton and sound by Jody Elff. Opens Feb. 22 at 7:30. (BAM's Harvey Theatre, 651 Fulton St. 718-646-4100.)

HOUSE/LIGHTS
The Wooster Group, on its thirtieth anniversary, revives its highly acclaimed 1999 show, which combines Gertrude Stein's "Dr. Faustus Lights the Lights" and Joseph Mawra's nineteen-sixties B movie, "Olga's House of Shame." Kate Valk leads the cast. Directed by Elizabeth LeCompte. In previews. Opens Feb. 27 at 8. (St. Ann's Warehouse, 38 Water St., Brooklyn. 718-254-8779.)

THE LAST DAYS OF JUDAS ISCARIOT
A new drama by Stephen Adly Guirgis ("Our Lady of 121st Street," "Jesus Hopped the A Train"), set in a quasi-modern courtroom in Purgatory, wrestles with the question of divine justice. With Eric Bogosian as Satan and Sam Rockwell as Judas. Directed by Philip Seymour Hoffman. In previews. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-239-6200.)

MC REELE
The Roundabout Theatre Company presents a new play by Stephen Belber ("Tape"), about a death-row inmate named Darius McReele, who is exonerated and goes on the lecture circuit after a journalist takes up his cause. Starring Anthony Mackie. Directed by Doug Hughes ("Doubt"). Two previews on Feb. 23. Opens Feb. 24 at 7. (Laura Pels, 111 W. 46th St. 212-719-1300.)

ON THE MOUNTAIN
A new drama by Christopher Shinn, about a single mother (Amy Ryan) who begins a relationship with a laid-back younger guy (Ebon Moss-Bachrach), who is in awe of her former lover, a Seattle rock legend who committed suicide. Directed by Jo Bonney. One preview on Feb. 23. Opens Feb. 24 at 7. (Playwrights Horizons Mainstage, 416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

PENTECOST
In the inaugural production at the Barrow Group's new theatre, art historians in a church in Europe come upon an apparent Old Master painting and disagree on its authenticity. When they learn it was painted by an Arab, not a European, their debate deepens. Written by David Edgar and directed by Seth Barrish. In previews. Opens Feb. 28 at 8. (312 W. 36th St. 212-868-4444.)

ROMANCE
The Atlantic Theatre Company presents a new play by David Mamet (the company's co-founder), a courtroom comedy set in the present day. With Larry Bryggman and Bob Balaban. Directed by Neil Pepe. In previews. Opens March 1 at 7. (336 W. 20th St. 212-239-6200.)

SPAMALOT
The Monty Python musical stars David Hyde Pierce, Tim Curry, and Hank Azaria. With a book by Eric Idle and music and lyrics by Idle and John Du Prez. Directed by Mike Nichols. In previews. (Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.)

WOMAN BEFORE A GLASS
Mercedes Ruehl stars in the première of a play by Lanie Robertson about the life and loves of the art patron and tastemaker Peggy Guggenheim. Directed by Casey Childs. In previews. (Promenade, Broadway at 76th St. 212-239-6200.)

OPENED RECENTLY

ALL WEAR BOWLERS
Geoff Sobelle, of Pig Iron Theatre Company, and Trey Lyford, of the Civilians, join forces in this existential physical comedy about silent-film clowns who fall out of the screen and find themselves stuck in a live clown act. (HERE, 145 Sixth Ave., near Spring St. 212-868-4444. Through March 12.)

BOOZY
Urban planning and punk rock come together for a theatrical slam dance in the newest offering by the Obie-winning young company Les Frères Corbusier ("A Very Merry Unauthorized Children's Scientology Pageant"). The show's hefty subtitle is "The Life, Death, and Subsequent Vilification of Le Corbusier and, More Importantly, Robert Moses." With original songs by Douglas J. Cohen. Directed by Alex Timbers. (Ohio, 66 Wooster St. 212-868-4444. Through March 5.)

BROOKLYN BOY
On the surface, Donald Margulies's new play is a rueful account of what passes on these shores for literary success; beneath that familiar terrain, however, it maps a much murkier emotional landscape: the jealousy that such success inevitably inspires. Eric (Adam Arkin), a young literary lion, interrupts his book tour to visit his dying father, Manny (the baleful Allan Miller), in the cancer ward of a Brooklyn hospital. Manny isn't big on reading; he is, however, big on belittling. Learning that his son's book is No. 11 on the *Times* best-seller list, Manny says, "You mean there *is* an eleven? I thought it only went to ten." Margulies's portrait of envy's spoiling rage is served up with large dollops of humor and a

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pinch of reparation. Directed by Daniel Sullivan. (Reviewed in our issue of 2/14 & 21/05.) (Biltmore, 261 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200.)

THE CHERRY ORCHARD
Christopher McElroen directs his adaptation of the Chekhov drama for the Classical Theatre of Harlem. (Reviewed in this issue.) (H.S.A. Theatre, 645 St. Nicholas Ave., near 141st St. 212-868-4444. Through Feb. 27.)

CORIOLANUS
Karin Coonrod directs Theatre for a New Audience's production of Shakespeare's tale about a class-divided society, set in Rome in wartime. With Christian Camargo, Roberta Maxwell, and Teagle F. Bougere. (John Jay College Theatre, Tenth Ave. at 58th St. 212-279-4200. Through March 4.)

COUNSELLOR-AT-LAW
In this polished revival of Elmer Rice's 1931 drama, the Tony-winning actor John Rubinstein gives a dynamic performance as a Jewish society lawyer in a profession dominated by white-shoe Wasps. Directed by Dan Wackerman. (St. Clement's, 423 W. 46th St. 212-868-4444. Through March 6.)

HAPPY DAYS
Lea DeLaria and David Greenspan star in the Worth Street Theatre Company's production of Samuel Beckett's dark farce. Directed by Jeff Cohen. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Classic Stage Company, 136 E. 13th St. 212-279-4200.)

HURLYBURLY
Written in 1984 and well revived by the New Group's deft, high-octane cast (which includes Ethan Hawke and Bobby Cannavale), David Rabe's play is a wild, daring, mysterious brainstorm that channels the horror and hilarity of the chaotic household of two debauched TV casting directors in the Hollywood Hills. As the assembled wastrels stumble, snort, and screw through their days, explosions of paranoia and rage, of sexual and moral carelessness, flare across the stage. All the characters are conspicuously wasted. Terminally distracted and unable to think, they are lost not only to the world but to themselves. Directed by Scott Elliott. (2/14 & 21/05) (Theatre Row, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

LEARNING CURVE
A new play by Rogelio Martinez is based on the armed takeover of a campus building by African-American students in 1968. Directed by Michael Sexton. (Beckett, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200. Through Feb. 27.)

THE LONELY WAY
The Mint Theatre presents the New York première of Arthur Schnitzler's languid drama about a worldly but fraying middle-aged painter (Ronald Guttman, in a fine performance) who tries to rekindle ties with the son whose pregnant mother he abandoned twenty-three years earlier. Set among Vienna's country-house set—whose life experiences furnished the fascinating case histories of Freud—the play, in a capable translation by Margaret Schaefer and the Mint's artistic director, Jonathan Bank, has the melancholy and regret of Schnitzler's other works but lacks their energy; the characters don't quite come to life. (311 W. 43rd St. 212-315-0231.)

SHOCKHEADED PETER
A nightmarish and beautiful production. Actors in Victorian dress act out children's cautionary tales, joined onstage by the superb Tiger Lillies, who accompany them with eerie, plangent music. (Little Shubert, 422 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200.)

SLEEPING BEAUTY
London's Young Vic Theatre Company brings its inventive, richly visual staging of Charles Perrault's classic to New York in a production that accents the dark side of the fairy tale and is meant for both young and grownup audiences. Directed by Rufus Norris. (New Victory, 209 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200. Through Feb. 27.)

THOM PAIN (BASED ON NOTHING)
A new one-man play by Will Eno stars James Urbaniak. (Reviewed in this issue.) (DR2, 103 E. 15th St. 212-239-6200.)

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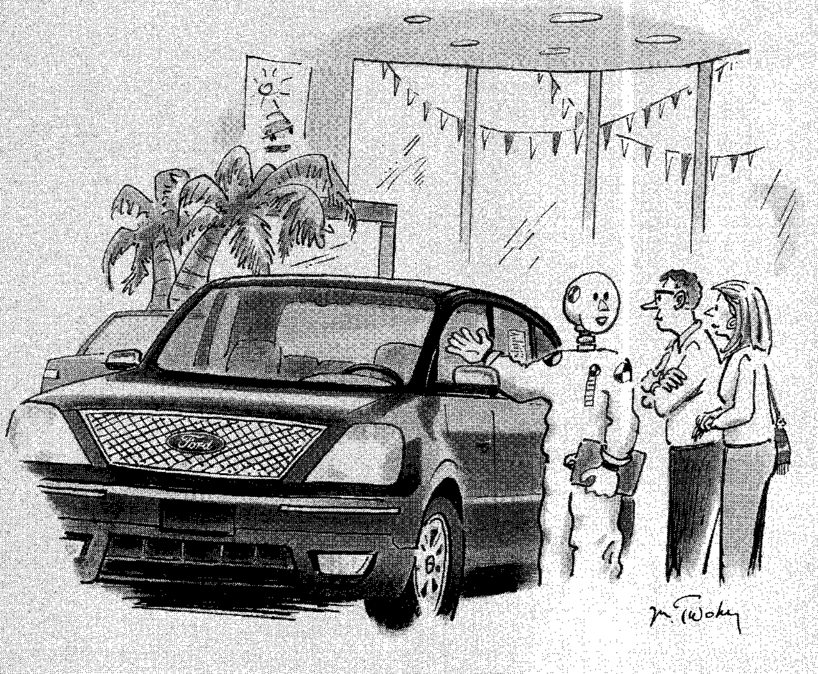

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THE 25TH ANNUAL PUTNAM COUNTY SPELLING BEE
The wracking tension of spelling-bee competition is turned into rollicking ironic fun in this new musical by William Finn ("Falsettos") and Rachel Sheinkin, in which each speller hams up the role of a different grade-school stereotype. There's the skinny, lisping overachiever Logainne Schwartzandgrubenierre (Sarah Saltzberg), who has two gay dads and blond hair so tightly braided that if you yanked a plait her brains might pop out; the goony Leaf Coneybear (Jesse Tyler Ferguson), a non-alpha speller who got bumped into the bee by chance; and the uproarious Dan Fogler, as William Barfee (pronounced Barfay), who is self-serious, plump, and rubber-limbed, and spells out each letter of his word with his shoe in a crazed ritual dance. Directed by James Lapine. (Second Stage, 307 W. 43rd St. 212-246-4422.)

DANCE

NEW YORK CITY BALLET
Highlights of the season's final week include Jerome Robbins's "Glass Pieces," set to music by Philip Glass, and three new ballets from last year: Susan Stroman's crowd-pleasing two-part silent-movie melodrama "Double Feature," Peter Martins's "Chichester Psalms," and Christopher Wheeldon's modern Scottish-influenced "Shambards." ♦ Feb. 22 at 7:30 and Feb. 23-24 at 8: "Double Feature." ♦ Feb. 25 at 8: "Symphony in Three Movements," "Afternoon of a Faun," "Andantino," and "Glass Pieces." ♦ Feb. 26 at 2: "Shambards," "Apollo," and "Glass Pieces." ♦ Feb. 26 at 8: "Glass Pieces," "Chichester Psalms," and "Symphony in Three Movements." ♦ Feb. 27 at 3: "Fanfare," "Liturgy," "Chichester Psalms," and "Stars and Stripes." (New York State Theatre, Lincoln Center. 212-870-5570.)

PAUL TAYLOR DANCE COMPANY
The troupe celebrates its fiftieth anniversary at City Center (see This Week). The season opens March 1 at 7, with "Syzygy," "Klezmerbluegrass," and "Esplanade." (131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212. Through March 20.)

ISRAEL CONTEMPORARY DANCE THEATRE
Rami Be'er's "Screensaver," receiving its New York première this week, was hailed as a sensation in Tel Aviv in 2002. Pumped up with high-tech video projection and an assaultive grab bag of music, the production is certainly attention-getting. Yet although Be'er's use of gym mats is inventive his technology-versus-nature theme isn't. Scenes of intimacy in a cruel world grow monotonous, and a figure in a hazmat suit—who looks like a refugee from "E.T."—doesn't help. (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. Feb. 22-25 at 8, Feb. 26 at 2 and 8, and Feb. 27 at 2 and 7:30.)

CATHY WEIS PROJECTS
"Electric Haiku" has its final week of performances at Dance Theatre Workshop. (219 W. 19th St. 212-924-0077. Feb. 23-26 at 7:30.)

ZVI DANCE
In "Territories," a new work by the Israeli-born choreographer Zvi Gotheiner, the subject is tribal identity and attachment to land. To strains of traditional Middle Eastern music and a score by Scott Killian, the company's limber dancers enact aggressive tribal games and negotiate borders drawn in chalk on the stage. Moving through the subdivided space in street clothes, the dancers pause to deliver monologues about their own nationalistic feelings. (The Duke on 42nd Street, 229 W. 42nd St. 212-415-5500. Feb. 23-24 and Feb. 26 at 8 and Feb. 27 at 2 and 7.)

CONDORS
The screwball all-male Japanese company returns to New York with a sequel to its sold-out 2001 show. "Mars: Conquest of the Galaxy II" is performed to Holst, techno-pop, and Muzak by a lineup of uniformed dancers who recall pop icons from Mick Jagger to Homer Simpson. The choreographer and soloist Ryohei Kondo explores the slapstick possibilities in a barrage of movement-based skits, downbeat-driven dances, and cartoonish videos. The evening's connective tissue is the Condors' madcap flair, which is like an amalgam of

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Monty Python, the Iron Chef, and psychedelic-era Beatles. (Japan Society, 333 E. 47th St. 212-752-3015. Feb. 24-25 at 7:30.)

"BUTTER MELTS AWAY MY LETTERS"
A louche dance fable about hustlers who share a New York City loft is punctuated by flashbacks of the roommates' troubled childhoods. Conceived and directed by Gian Marco Lo Forte and choreographed by Stephanie Rafferty, with movement influenced by the club scene. (La Mama, 74A E. 4th St. 212-475-7710. Feb. 24-26 at 8 and Feb. 27 at 2:30 and 8.)

"CITIZENS OR INDIVIDUALS?"
Judith Sánchez Ruiz, Michelle Boulé, Sari Rodman, and Danielle Goldman perform a new work by Ruiz for Danspace's "Citi/Dans" series, investigating the interrelation of man and society. Set to music by Dafnis Prieto, which is performed live by Prieto, Jason Lindner, and Dana Leong. (St. Mark's In-the-Bowery, Second Ave. at 10th St. 212-674-8194. Feb. 24-26 at 8:30 and Feb. 27 at 7:30.)

"RADIANT IMPRINTS"
The InnerLandscapes Dance Theatre collective—Nomi Bachar, Valerie Norman, Kathryn Sullivan, and Natasa Trifan—presents six new works. (Merce Cunningham Studio, 55 Bethune St. 212-726-0660. Feb. 24-25 at 9 and Feb. 26-27 at 8.)

ELEANOR DUBINSKY / CHRISTINE SUAREZ
Two women present works in progress inspired by their personal histories for Danspace Project's "Draft-Work" series. In "8kin," Dubinsky sheds her clothes as she explores her childhood relationship with her cello, and in "Solo Series Project," Suarez uses aggressive, quick choreography to relay episodes of youthful rebellion. Curated by Ishmael Houston-Jones. (St. Mark's In-the-Bowery, Second Ave. at 10th St. 212-674-8194. Feb. 26 at 3.)

NIGHT LIFE

CONCERTS

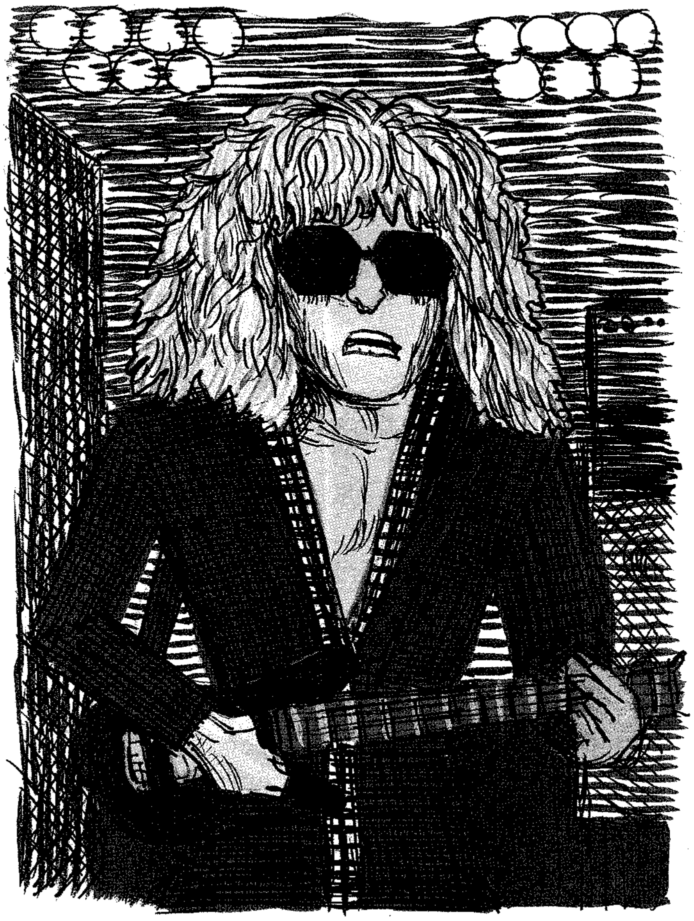
"BLACK FEBRUARY 2005"
Lawrence D. (Butch) Morris is a composer and bandleader whose proprietary system of "conduction" allows him to guide improvising musicians while imposing compositional coherence. Throughout this month, Morris is celebrating the twentieth anniversary of his conduction system with a show every night at different venues around town. His "Band Big!" and "New York Skyscraper" nights are recommended. (For details on show times and locations, visit www.conduction.us. See also Joe's Pub.)

WORLD MUSIC INSTITUTE
Feb. 25-26 at 8: The **Qi Shu Fang Peking Opera Company** preserves the Chinese theatrical tradition of Peking opera, which is also known as "action opera," and features fancy costumes, copious makeup, bright masks, juggling, sword throwing, mime, and acrobatics. (Skirball Center, New York University, 566 LaGuardia Pl., at Washington Sq. S. For more information, call 212-545-7536.)

"AMERICAN SONGBOOK"
Laura Cantrell, a Nashville native who has spent half her life in New York City, has long brought a bit of country comfort to her adoptive home as the host of WFMU's "Radio Thrift Shop." She's also a whip-smart singer with a back-porch sensibility who recently signed with Matador Records. Here she's joined by the singer-songwriters **Richard Buckner** and **Laura Veirs.** (Allen Room, Broadway at 60th St. 212-721-6500. Feb. 24 at 8:30.)

JAZZ AT LINCOLN CENTER
Duke Ellington spent a good deal of his professional life riding on trains, and the experience inspired him to write a number of terrific tunes. The **Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra's** "Full Steam Ahead" focusses on the romance of the rails and features spots from the trombonist **Wycliffe Gordon** and the bassist **Rodney Whitaker.** (Rose Theatre, Broadway at 60th St. 212-721-6500. Feb. 24-26 at 8.)

INTERPOL
These sharply dressed New York City rockers, who made their name with sombre and chilly post-punk paeans, have a second album, "Antics," that finds them passing through marginally more sunny territory. (Radio City Music Hall, Sixth Ave. at 50th St. 212-247-4777. March 1-2 at 8.)



The rock icon Ian Hunter brings a string section to Joe's Pub.

CLUBS

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

BARBÈS
376 9th St., Park Slope, Brooklyn (718-965-9177)—Feb. 25: The guitarist and singer **Howard Fishman** trots out songs from his upcoming fourth album; expect a romp through New Orleans R. & B., small-group jazz, country, rock, and whatever else strikes his fancy.

BOWERY BALLROOM
6 Delancey St. (212-533-2111)—Feb. 23: The intimate confessional raps of **Aesop Rock.** Feb. 24: The young lead singer of **Antony and the Johnsons** has a sweet and haunting voice reminiscent of Bryan Ferry, and a theatrical, pansexual stage presence that recalls early Marc Bolan. His performances have attracted the attention of Lou Reed, Rufus Wainwright, and other more established figures, who make guest appearances on his new record, "I Am a Bird Now." Feb. 25: The local duo **Animal Collective** matches folksy harmonies and a love of melody with psychedelic experimentation. The results are both beautiful and disorienting. Feb. 26-28: The dreamy New York City quartet **Luna** plays its final shows. March 1: The **Frames** are an impassioned rock band from Dublin, Ireland, who have a catalogue of arena-ready anthems. With **Mark Geary,** an Irish singer-songwriter who used to open for Jeff Buckley at the old Sin-é, back when it was in the East Village.

BOWERY POETRY CLUB
308 Bowery, at Bleecker St. (212-614-0505)—The downtown guitarist **Gary Lucas** has played with Leonard Bernstein, Captain Beefheart, and Joan Osborne, to name but a few. His latest collaborator is the Dutch lute master **Jozef Van Wissem,** who is making a rare New York City appearance on Feb. 25, in which the pair will dip into their repertoire of mesmerizing soundscapes.

IRVING PLAZA
17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (212-777-6800)—Feb. 22: The Tennessee band **Kings of Leon** was dubbed the "Southern Strokes" some two years ago by a besotted British press. More recently the band impressed a few foreigners who are slightly more influential in this country—U2, for whom they will open on their upcoming U.S. tour. The Kings are here with songs from their sophomore record, "Aha Shake Heartbreak." Feb. 26-27: **Ryan Cabrera,** somewhat notorious for dating Ashlee Simpson, is being groomed for stardom as one might primp a prize-winning miniature poodle. Despite these handicaps, Cabrera delivers sensitive, lovelorn pop, and it might just earn him a career that lasts longer than five minutes.

JOE'S PUB
425 Lafayette St. (212-539-8777)—Feb. 23: **Burnt Sugar.** Greg Tate, a New York writer, musician, and friend and student of Lawrence D. (Butch) Morris (see Concerts), applies Morris's conduction system to a large electric band. It uses the style of Miles Davis's "Bitches Brew" as a starting point for its dense and exciting improvisations. Feb. 24: The country-folk singer **Tom Russell's** latest album, "Hotwalker," references such hard-living icons as Lenny Bruce, Jack Kerouac, and Charles Bukowski and deals with the theme of the outsider in American culture. It's something Russell knows firsthand, as one of his passions is the unfashionable sport of bullfighting. March 1: **Ian Hunter.** As the front man for the seventies rockers Mott the Hoople, Hunter had his biggest hit singing David Bowie's "All the Young Dudes," but his influence ran much deeper—he fused Bowie's glam with Dylan's poetry and created a rock-star style all his own. He's been a solo artist for more than two decades; his most recent release, "Strings Attached," is a greatest-hits collection that spans his entire career and is the basis for this rare club show, complete with a string section.

MAXWELL'S
1039 Washington St., Hoboken (201-653-1703)—Feb. 27: The Japanese trio **Guitar Wolf** plays a ferocious brand of rockabilly-infused punk with vocals delivered in an indecipherable hybrid of Japanese and English.

MERCURY LOUNGE
217 E. Houston St. (212-260-4700)—Feb. 25: **Rachel's,** a Louisville collective specializing in lushly orchestrated atmospheric pop.

NORTHSIX
66 N. 6th St., Williamsburg, Brooklyn (718-599-5103)—Feb. 25: The local heroes in **Longwave** weave a broad sonic tapestry with their guitars, expanding on the new-rock terrain staked out by the likes of the Strokes and the Yeah Yeah Yeahs. The Austin band **I Love You But I've Chosen Darkness** worked with Spoon's Britt Daniel on its self-titled EP. Feb. 26: **Rachel's** (see the Mercury Lounge).

GARY PANTER

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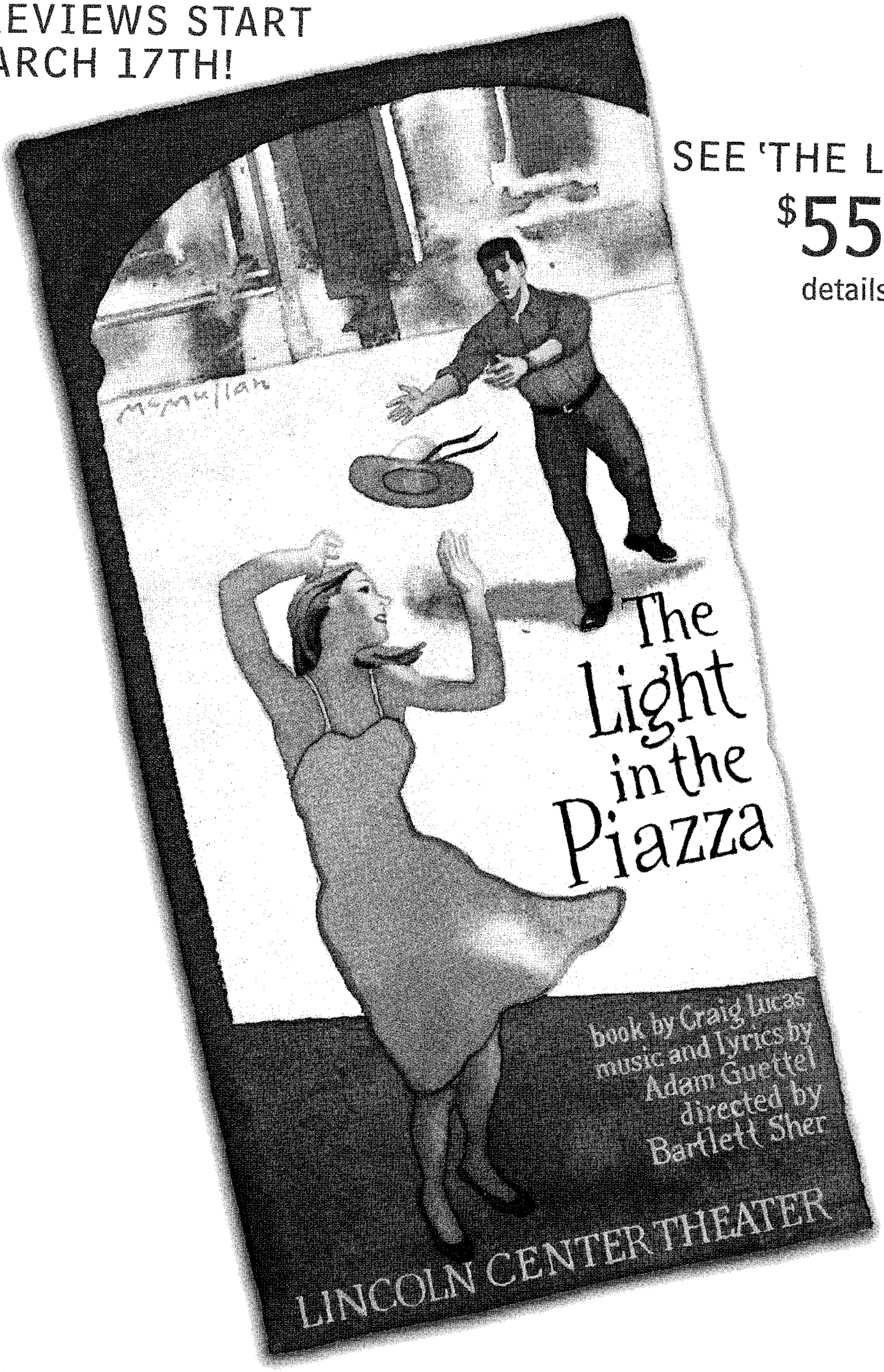
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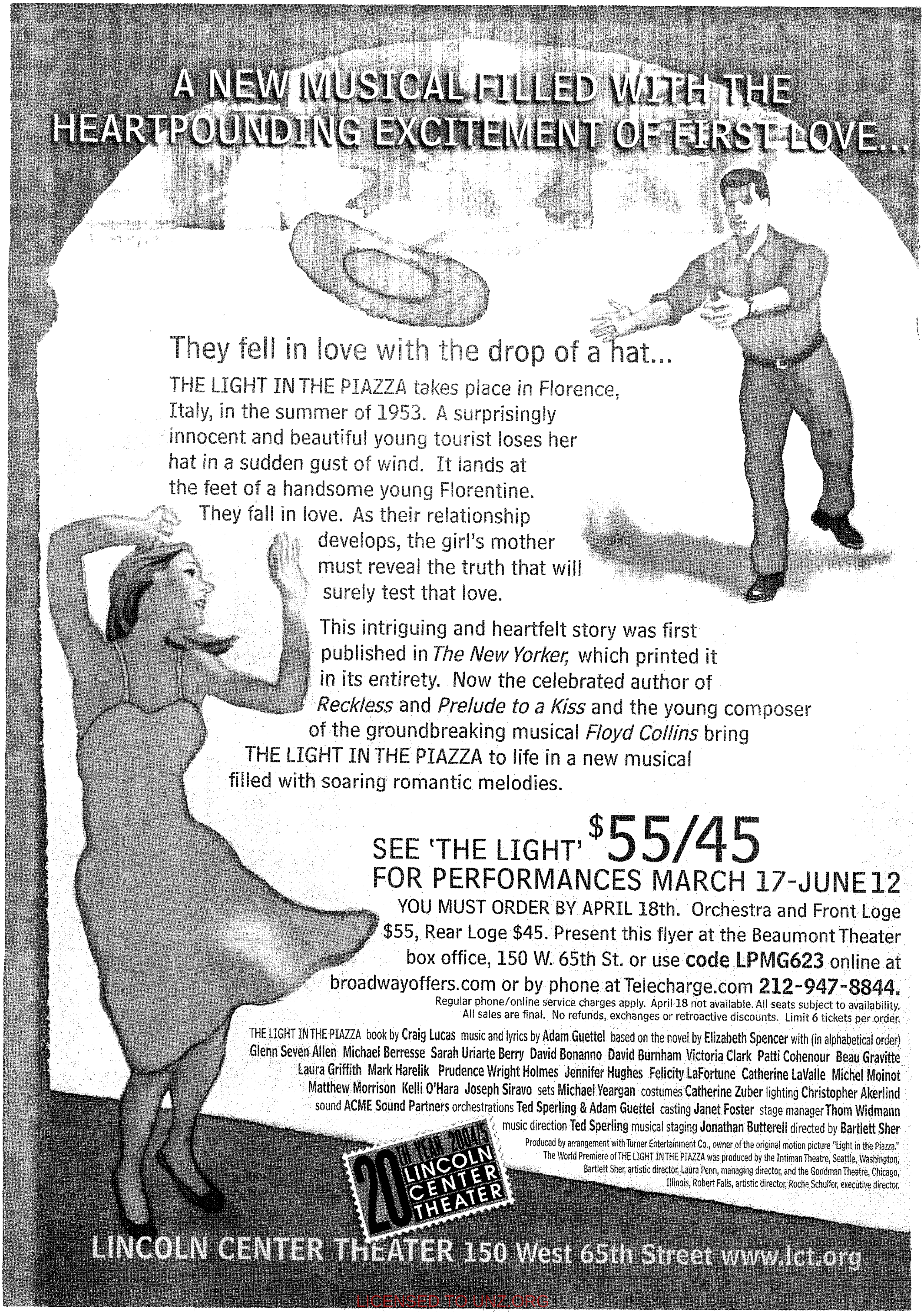

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Produced by arrangement with Turner Entertainment Co., owner of the original motion picture "Light in the Piazza." The World Premiere of THE LIGHT IN THE PIAZZA was produced by the Intiman Theatre, Seattle, Washington, Bartlett Sher, artistic director, Laura Penn, managing director, and the Goodman Theatre, Chicago, Illinois, Robert Falls, artistic director, Roche Schulfer, executive director.

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SIN-É
150 Attorney St. (212-388-0077)—Feb. 25: The hard-rocking, long-running Brooklyn trio **Oneida** trashes genres with the same passion that other, newer New York City bands devote to dressing for magazine photo shoots. With the **Apes**, a four-piece D.C. band that proves you don't need guitars to make a ruckus. They use an organ, a bass, a drum, and copious amounts of energy instead.

WEBSTER HALL
125 E. 11th St. (212-353-1600)—Feb. 23: **Kings of Leon** (see Irving Plaza). Feb. 26: **Ian Brown.** Once upon a time, in the late eighties and early nineties, there was a band called the Stone Roses. They came from Manchester and, for a short while, ruled the world—or at least the British charts. Then time passed and the Roses dropped from sight. Its members embarked on solo careers, but Brown, their former front man, knows where his power comes from. He's touring in support of his fourth solo release, "Solarized," but he's also reportedly including a few Stone Roses hits in his set, and his backing band is staffed with members of a Stone Roses tribute band.

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

CARLYLE HOTEL
Madison Ave. at 76th St. (212-744-1600)—The Café Carlyle, a snug, windowless enclave in the doorman district, features discreet waiters, wrap-around murals, and, through Feb. 26, **Ute Lemper.**

DIZZY'S CLUB COCA-COLA
Broadway at 60th St. (212-258-9595)—Through Feb. 27: **Jim Hall,** jazz's premier guitarist, has formed an unlikely but wholly satisfying alliance with the saxophonist **Greg Osby.** Hall plays it cool, Osby turns on the heat, and the ensuing mixture cooks.

FEINSTEIN'S AT THE REGENCY
540 Park Ave., at 61st St. (212-339-4095)—Through March 12: **Chita Rivera.** What becomes a theatre legend most? How about defining roles in the original Broadway productions of "West Side Story," "Bye Bye Birdie," "Chicago," and "Kiss of the Spider Woman"? Expect the actress, singer, and dancer to tear up Feinstein's sliver of a stage.

IRIDIUM
1650 Broadway, at 51st St. (212-582-2121)—Feb. 23-27: The **Kenny Garrett** quartet. Garrett is a talented player who, like many of his generation, often loses his way in a recording studio. Onstage, though, this rampaging saxophonist makes a fine showing. Mondays belong to the electric-guitar innovator **Les Paul.**

JAZZ STANDARD
116 E. 27th St. (212-576-2232)—Feb. 22-23: The **Stefano di Battista** quartet. The title of the Italian saxophonist's latest release, "Parker's Mood," removes any doubt as to where his heart lies. The world may not need yet another bebop fancier, but at least di Battista approaches his Bird homage with taste, exuberance, and individuality.

LE JAZZ AU BAR
41 E. 58th St. (212-308-9455)—Through Feb. 27: The legendary vocalist **Ruth Brown.**

VILLAGE VANGUARD
178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (212-255-4037)—Through Feb. 27: The promising young trumpeter **Jeremy Pelt** has recently been adding a string quartet to his band, but for his Vanguard début Pelt jettisons the extras, making the most of a conventional neo-bop quintet. The **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra** holds sway on Mondays.

ART

MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-879-5500)—The Iris and B. Gerald Cantor Roof Garden, usually closed in the winter months, will be open through Feb. 27, weather permitting, for aerial viewing of "The Gates," Christo and Jeanne-Claude's project in Central Park. ♦ **"Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640): The Drawings."** Through April 3. ♦ **"From Filippo Lippi to Piero della Francesca: Fra Carnevale and the Making of a Renaissance Master."** Scholars have been slowly unearthing the oeuvre of Fra Carnevale, an artist little known aside from his mention in Vasari's "Lives of the Artists," over the course of the past century; this exhibition presents what is now known of the lost master's paintings, along with samples of his contemporaries' works. Through May 1. ♦ Duccio's "Madonna and Child," circa 1300, a triumphant recent acquisition for the Met. Through March 13. ♦ **"Wild: Fashion Untamed."** Clothes and accessories derived from and inspired by animals. Through March 13. ♦ **"The Kano School: Orthodoxy and Iconoclasm."** Through June 5. ♦ **"Heritage of Power: Ancient Sculpture from West Mexico, the Andrall E. Pearson Family Collection."** Through April 3. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9400)—**"Projects 82: Mark Dion—Rescue Archaeology."** While the museum was in the midst of its expansion and renovation, Dion excavated traces of former Rockefeller town houses and the old Dorset Hotel from beneath the sculpture garden for this site-specific project. Through March 14. ♦ **"Michael Wesely:**

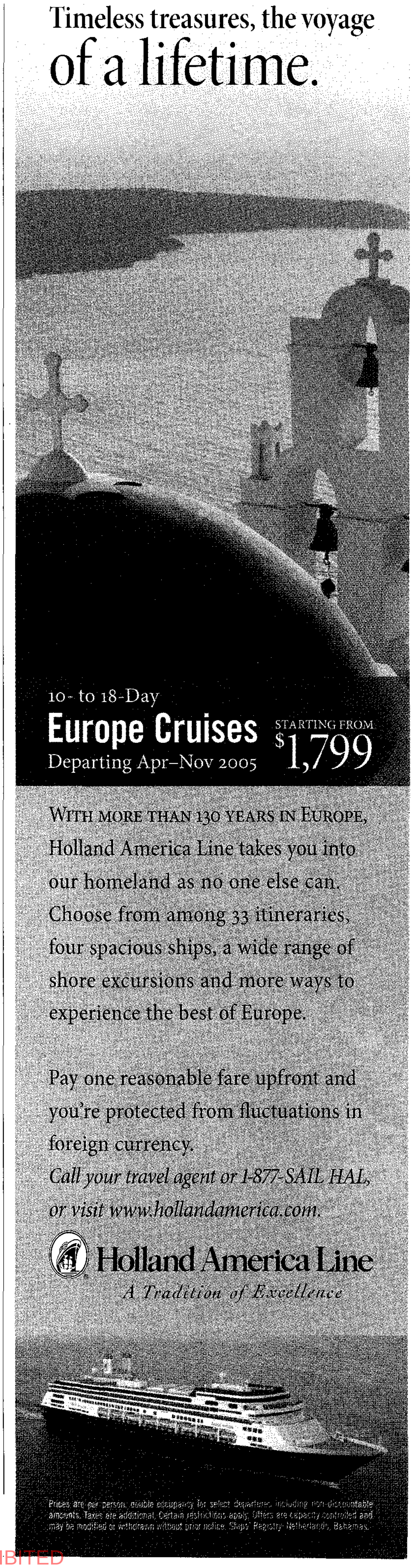
TABLES FOR TWO

DE MARCO'S PIZZERIA
146 W. Houston St. (212-253-2290)—Over the past few months, nervous anticipation has characterized discussions among pizza fiends about the quasi-expansion of Brooklyn's legendary Di Fara's into Manhattan. To begin with, there was the promise of pedigree—two of Domenico De Marco's children are in on the new venture, although they were forbidden to import the forty-year-old business's name. Last month, the pizza blog sliceny.com posted photographs from the two pizzerias taken the same afternoon, in order to compare the bottom-crust charring (Di Fara's proved slightly blacker, but the bloggers admitted the test had no bearing on the crust's crispness).

The good news is that the De Marco's slice is nearly as good as Di Fara's. It has the signature savory tomato sauce, like the one Domenico makes using herbs he grows in his shop windows, and each pie gets three kinds of cheese and a final drenching with olive oil before it hits the oven. But they've got some fundamental elements wrong. Domenico makes each pie fresh for customers, who watch as rapt as if it were sushi at Masa, pummelling a lump of dough into shape and futzing over the arrangement of mozzarella on top. At De Marco's, the kitchen works ahead, stockpiling perfect circles of dough and reheating slices on demand. It takes its toll: the congealed cheese never tastes just right again, and the layering of flavors and textures in each bite becomes muted.

Even so, for the unobsessed, the thin-crust slices from the round pies will seem great. They are certainly a triumph compared with the rest of the pizzas. The square, thick-crust slices, a long-baked sacrament at Di Fara's, are terrible at De Marco's—they taste like focaccia smeared with Ragú. And, even more mysteriously, the whole pies, served in the depressing, airport-bar-like restaurant next door, aren't half as good as the take-out slices. It's no surprise that the Manhattan place lacks the dusty charm of Di Fara's, where about the only addition in forty years is the vintage shortwave radio on the windowsill. De Marco's may have the best slice in Manhattan, but it's no substitute for the trip to Avenue J. (Open daily for lunch and dinner. Slices $2.75; whole pies $18.50-$32.50.)

—Owen Phillips



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Open Shutter at the Museum of Modern Art." The German photographer turned his long exposure method (he has left the shutter open for as long as three years) on MOMA while it was under construction. Through mid-2005. ♦ **"Contemporary Voices: Works from the UBS Art Collection."** Through April 25. (Open Wednesdays through Mondays, 10:30 to 5:30, and Friday evenings until 8.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3500)—The Guggenheim has the largest collection of work by Vasily Kandinsky in the United States, and its curators have decided to devote one gallery to his work permanently. **"Kandinsky Gallery: An Inaugural Selection"** kicks things off. Through May 11. ♦ Among the artists represented in **"Recent Acquisitions: Contemporary Sculpture"** are Los Carpinteros, Robert Gober, and Tom Friedman. Through Feb. 27. ♦ Selections from the permanent collection are on display. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 10 to 5:45, and Fridays, 10 to 8.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (212-570-3676)—**"Tim Hawkinson,"** a mid-career retrospective of the California artist's diverse inventions. Through May 29. ♦ **"Cy Twombly: Fifty Years of Works on Paper."** Through May 8. ♦ **"Ellen Gallagher: DeLuxe."** A series of embellished images based on advertisements from mid-century African-American magazines. Through May 15. ♦ **"James Lee Byars: The Perfect Silence."** Drawings, installations, and sculpture. Through March 6. ♦ **"Political Nature,"** a modest gathering of prints and drawings by Walton Ford, Trenton Doyle Hancock, Frank Moore, and Stephanie Syjuco. Through March 27. ♦ **"Bill Viola: Five Angels for the Millennium."** A large-scale video installation made in 2001. Through March 6. (Open Wednesdays, Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 1 to 9.)

ASIA SOCIETY
Park Ave. at 70th St. (212-288-6400)—The delicate blue glazed vases, jade-green plates, and dragon-blazoned bowls presented in **"Imperial Elegance: Chinese Ceramics from the Asia Society's Rockefeller Collection,"** ranging in date from the Sung (960-1279) to the Ch'ing (1644-1911) dynasties, evoke a fantasy of instant connoisseurship. But even the totally untrained eye can't help responding to the radiant subtlety of the pigmented surfaces and the sensuous geometry of the forms. Through May 1. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 11 to 6, and Friday evenings until 9.)

COOPER-HEWITT NATIONAL DESIGN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 91st St. (212-849-8300)—**"Josef and Anni Albers: Designs for Living."** Through Feb. 27. ♦ **"Design ≠ Art: Functional Objects from Donald Judd to Rachel Whiteread."** Through Feb. 27. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10 to 5; Fridays, 10 to 9; Saturdays, 10 to 6; and Sundays, noon to 6.)

MUSEO DEL BARRIO
Fifth Ave. at 104th St. (212-831-7272)—**"Retratos: 2,000 Years of Latin American Portraits."** Paintings and sculptures dating from pre-Columbian times to the present. Through March 20. (Open Wednesdays through Sundays, 11 to 5, and Thursday evenings until 8.)

STUDIO MUSEUM IN HARLEM
144 W. 125th St. (212-864-4500)—A Benin-born artist's residency in New York has yielded a stunningly strange body of work, an ecumenical stew of African and American culture and architecture. **"Meschac Gaba: Tresses"** comprises eighteen sculptures based on buildings in New York and Benin, all crafted out of artificial braids. Here's the Citigroup Center rendered in multicolor plaiting; the Chrysler Building reinterpreted as a brown, ochre, and gold wig; the Flatiron a woven mass of chocolate and auburn. The pièce de résistance, though, has to be the Guggenheim, whose rotunda, done in gray braids, is poised like an oversize pillbox hat on a wig stand. Through March 27. ♦ The survey **"African Queen"** cuts a wide swath through its subject—representations of black women—while also functioning as a review of contemporary African-diaspora art. Through March 27. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, and Sundays, noon to 6; Saturdays, 10 to 6.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

Unless otherwise noted, galleries are open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6.

CHRISTO AND JEANNE-CLAUDE
"The Gates," the couple's much anticipated Central Park project, traces twenty-three miles of pathways with rippling orange-gold banners. Throughout Central Park through Feb. 27.

STEPHEN VITIELLO
"The Smallest of Wings," Vitiello's new six-channel sound installation, uses minimal elements to maximal effect. Moths recorded in upstate New York zoom around and past and sometimes into (*thwip!*) a microphone, the percussion of their beating wings paired with the thinner, higher thrum of Brazilian hummingbirds and what sound like crickets and the occasional fly. The familiar noises, pared and edited and recombined, are, in flashes, as dizzyingly lush as a symphony. In the next room, a series of photographs document what happens when a cannon is fired into a speaker, and a joint effort with Tony Oursler results in a wall dotted with tiny, frowny-faced speakers emitting electronic chatter. Through Feb. 26. (The Project, 37 W. 57th St. 212-688-4673.)

Works on paper by John Lurie are on view at Roebling Hall, in Chelsea.

RICHARD WRIGHT
Unobtrusive, decorative gouaches, as discreet as wallpaper or stencilling, climb up the gallery walls and perch in high corners. One painted in black, like an angular fragment of Op art, lurks under a skylight, so that viewers have to enter the room and turn around to see it. Another dives from the ceiling like a lacy red missile. From a distance everything looks mechanically applied, but closer inspection reveals drips and traces of the pencilled grids on the wall that guided the artist's hand. Through March 5. (Gagosian, 980 Madison Ave. 212-744-2313.)

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

GUY BEN-NER
Ben-Ner brings a soft touch to video, borrowing heavily from home-movie aesthetics for two works addressing parent-child relationships; the results teeter between the sweetly touching and the tediously cloying. In "Wild Boy," the artist's toddler son attempts a mirror imitation of his father, dressed in a suit and carrying a cane, in the manner of Buster and Joe Keaton. The rest of the family gets involved in "Elia—A Story of an Ostrich Chick," a jerkily paced narrative—screened backward—about the migration of a flock of flightless birds. Big floppy ostrich costumes share the gallery space. They should probably register as sculpture, but they seem more like spare props in storage. Through Feb. 26. (Postmasters, 459 W. 19th St. 212-727-3323.)

MONIKA BRAVO
Two small video screens present six-part albums of pretty, mostly static scenes—mist over water, a balloon floating in a swimming pool, views down hallways or stairs—that have been subtly cut apart, rearranged, and otherwise tweaked, and backed with music by the English composer Max Richter. Eight pieces the artist calls "Hexagrams" are in fact squares, aluminum light boxes fronted with out-of-focus hazy-bright C-prints. Bravo's abstracted video footage and photographs contrast careful craftsmanship with willful obscurity; the effect is like waking up on a tropical island, or, perhaps, in a disco, without immediate memory of how you might have got there. Through Feb. 26. (Wolkowitz, 601 W. 26th St. 212-243-8830.)

RYAN JOHNSON / AARON SPANGLER
Paper isn't usually thought of as a sculptor's medium, but Johnson makes it one with his elaborate, life-size constructions. A pair of embracing skeletons is airily rendered in yellow scraps like Post-Its; a striped paper umbrella, inverted as if by a storm, is splayed on the floor. Most impressive is a 3-D paper doll of a sad guy in socks and boxers, wrapped in an afghan and holding a remote control. In the front room are Spangler's black wooden reliefs of Gothic forests with junked cars, water towers, and other non-medieval detritus lurking in the shadows. Through Feb. 26. (Feuer, 530 W. 24th St. 212-989-7700.)

SARAH LUCAS
The bad-girl sculptor Lucas constructs naughty totems from nylon stockings, metal housewares, and naked light bulbs. A heavy, old-fashioned bed frame leans against a cinder-block wall, stockings dangling limply from its springs; twin lights droop from a clothes hanger above another light tucked in a bucket, miming breasts and a belly. Stockings stretched from shoes cast in concrete and suspenders hooked over a coat hanger also serve as punny shorthand for the human figure. There's plenty of wit on display (including the show's title, "God Is Dad"), but the assemblages start to have a tired, mannered feel. Through March 14. (Gladstone, 515 W. 24th St. 212-206-9300.)

LUDWIKA OGORZELEC
This Polish artist has reshaped the gallery with a dropped ceiling of shimmering, crystalline forms made from stretched plastic film. In the back room is a series of small sculptures, intricately built from thousands of tiny slivers of wood and stone bound together with glue. A modest, moving charmer of a show. Through Feb. 26. (Margolis, 523 W. 25th St. 212-242-3013.)

ANDY FRIEDMAN

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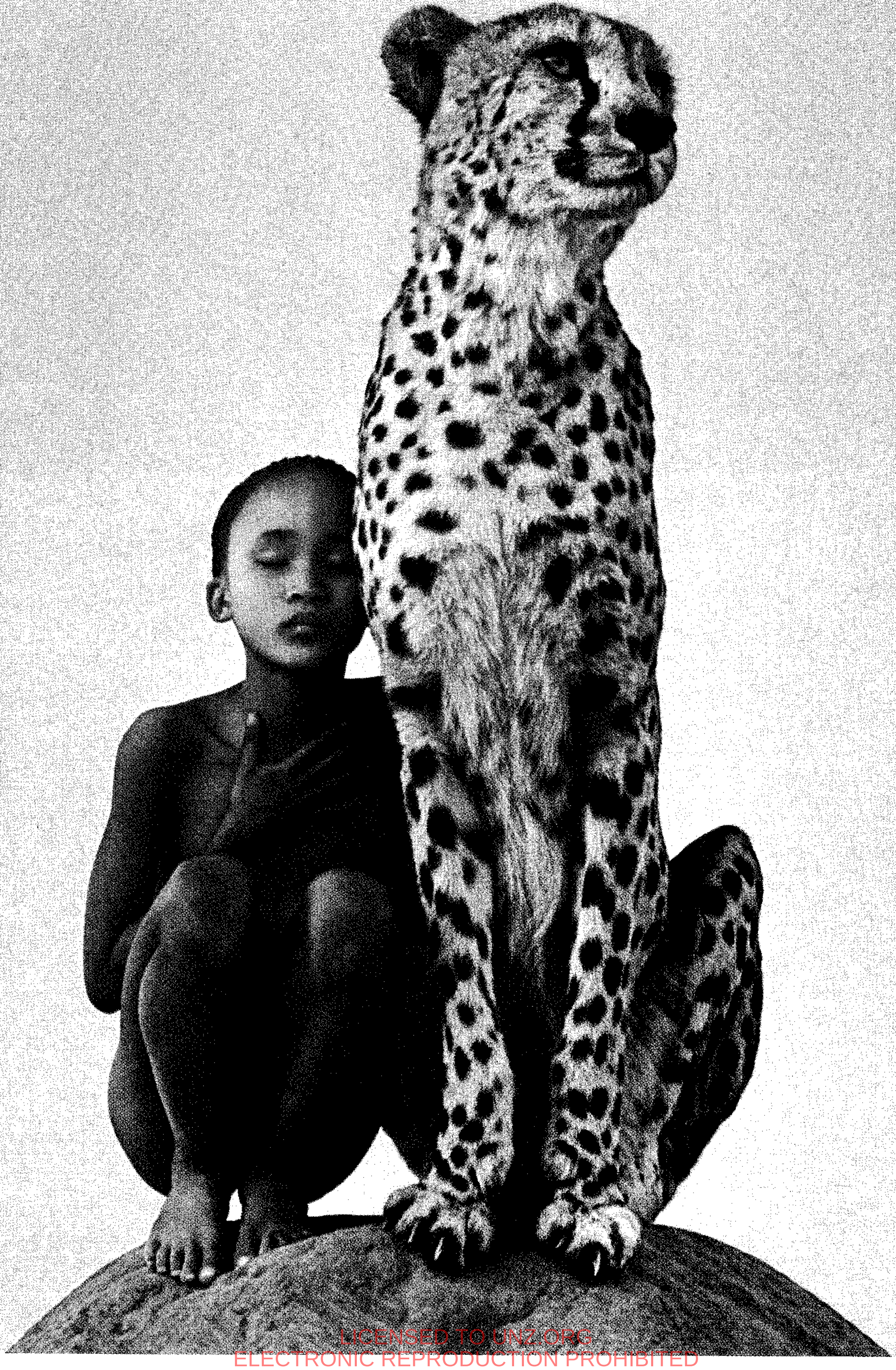

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"Reggio Emilia, Italy, 1984," a photograph by Charles Traub at Gitterman.

Short List

CECILY BROWN
Gagosian, 555 W. 24th St. 212-741-1111.
Through Feb. 26.

JOHN LURIE
Roebling Hall, 606 W. 26th St. 212-929-8180.
Through Feb. 26.

PHOTOGRAPHY

PETER HUJAR
Downtown New York at night in the seventies and early eighties, before SoHo and the meatpacking district were turned into shopping malls, was anarchic, filthy, and fun. In these glistening photographs of unpopulated streets and lighted downtown office buildings; of a smashed car and a defunct diner; of angelic, muscled pretty boys and flocks of giddy queens on Halloween, Hujar captures the high jinks, the innocence, and also the wreckage of this vivid period, when people came to the city to reinvent themselves. The images recall Abbott, Arbus, and Evans but have their own distinct period feel. In "Blanket 1985," a piece of old carpet, folded inside out, is heaped on the sidewalk, alongside a string of battered Guston-like trash cans, suggesting the era's cold, bitter comfort; two years later, Hujar, along with so many of his subjects, was dead, of AIDS. Through March 5. (Marks, 523 W. 24th St. 212-243-0200.)

KARINE LAVAL
A series of color photographs of swimming pools in France, Portugal, and Spain, along with images of Norwegian snowscapes. They have a strong sensual and graphic presence, and some (e.g., the baby-blue side of a new car, with a red door handle and windows frosted with snow) come dangerously close to hip advertising. These relaxed pictures don't strive for anything big, which is part of their appeal: the intertwining of atmosphere and memory is enough. Through March 5. (Benrubi, 41 E. 57th St. 212-888-6007.)

LEON LEVINSTEIN
Like all street photographers, Levinstein was drawn to people who appeared not to be doing much of anything. He found them in Coney Island and on the Lower East Side, in Times Square and Central Park. Often, he photographed his subjects from behind: a young man combing his dirty hair, his suspenders marking a white "X" in the center of the frame; the immense sphere of a woman's blond hairdo; the smooth, suntanned back of a fat man at the beach, recalling Weston's bell pepper. But Levinstein's most arresting images confront his subjects head on: a prostitute in a Pucci-style minidress glaring back at the camera; three children—one of them naked—looking out from a tenement window. Through March 5. (Greenberg, 41 E. 57th St. 212-334-0010.)

"MAPPING SITTING: ON PORTRAITURE AND PHOTOGRAPHY"
The Lebanese co-curators of this group show, Akram Zaatari and Walid Raad, provide a compact yet insightful primer of photographic practices in the Middle East—and, by extension, of daily life in the region—during the twentieth century. Culled from the archives of the Beirut-based Arab Image Foundation, the images range from the mundane (identification photos, military group portraits) to the provocative (a playfully erotic series of prints from 1949 and 1950 featuring men stretched out like odalisques on a beach rock). Projections of superimposed "photo surprise" shots revisit the genteel urbanism of Arab cities in the forties and fifties through images of families, children, and friends, and groups of stylish young women strolling arm in arm through a square in Lebanon. In contradistinction to the prevalent images of the Middle East in today's media, chadors and kaffiyehs appear rarely in this collection. Through April 2. (Grey, 100 Washington Sq. E. 212-998-6780.)

Short List

YASUMASA MORIMURA
Luhring Augustine, 531 W. 24th St.
212-206-9100. Through Feb. 26.

JACK PIERSON
Danziger, 521 W. 26th St. 212-629-6778.
Through March 19.

CHARLES TRAUB
Gitterman, 170 E. 75th St. 212-734-0868.
Through April 2.

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES

CHRISTIE'S
Feb. 23 at 10 A.M.: This sale devoted to the origins of cyberspace traces the roots of the Internet all the way back to John Napier, a mathematician who devised several mechanical methods for simplifying multiplication, all laid out in his 1617 best-seller, "Rabdologiae." Other firsts among the more than a thousand manuscripts, books, technical reports, and ephemera on offer include an inscribed edition of the play "R.U.R.," by the Czech fantasist Karel Čapek (where the word "robot" appeared in print for the first time), and the top lot for the sale, the typescript business plan for the world's first electronic computer company, E.C.C. ♦ March 1-2 at 10 A.M. and 2: This month's House Sale includes a Louis XVI-style cream painted bergère upholstered in yellow linen and an American brass-mounted steer-horn settee, which boasts a dozen steer horns emerging in different directions like tentacles. (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000.)

SWANN
Feb. 28 at 1: The house marks Black History Month with its tenth annual sale of printed and manuscript African-Americana. (104 E. 25th St. 212-254-4710.)

THE ART SHOW
In the latest edition of the yearly Art Dealers Association of America fair, seventy dealers exhibit paintings, sculpture, prints, photographs, ceramics, and other items. Of interest are several one-man shows, including one of works by the idio-

HBO FILMS '05

FEBRUARY
MARCH
APRIL
MAY
JUNE

LACKAWANNA BLUES

From acclaimed stage director George C. Wolfe with a screenplay by Ruben Santiago-Hudson, an affectionate look at an era gone by and the legacy of one courageous woman and the colorful characters who lived with her.

STARRING: S. Epatha Merkerson, Mos Def, Louis Gossett, Jr., Macy Gray, Terrence Dashon Howard, Rosie Perez, Jimmy Smits, Jeffrey Wright

SOMETIMES IN APRIL

From writer/director Raoul Peck (*Lumumba*), this epic film depicts a nation's loss seen through one family's struggle to survive the Rwandan genocide of 1994.

STARRING: Idris Elba, Debra Winger

WARM SPRINGS

From Emmy-winning director Joseph Sargent and writer Margaret Nagle, the intimate and little known story of FDR's struggle against polio and how it helped shape and define his presidency.

STARRING: Kenneth Branagh, Cynthia Nixon, David Paymer, Tim Blake Nelson, Kathy Bates

MAY

EMPIRE FALLS

An all-star cast graces this compassionate and humorous look at small town America in this mini-series directed by Fred Schepisi with a screenplay by Richard Russo, based on his Pulitzer Prize-winning novel.

STARRING: Ed Harris, Philip Seymour Hoffman, Helen Hunt, Paul Newman, Robin Wright Penn, Aidan Quinn, Joanne Woodward

JUNE

THE GIRL IN THE CAFÉ

A call to arms in the guise of a romantic drama with a timely, powerful message from director David Yates and acclaimed writer Richard Curtis.

STARRING: Bill Nighy (*Love Actually*), Kelly McDonald (*Gosford Park*)

It's where creativity lives

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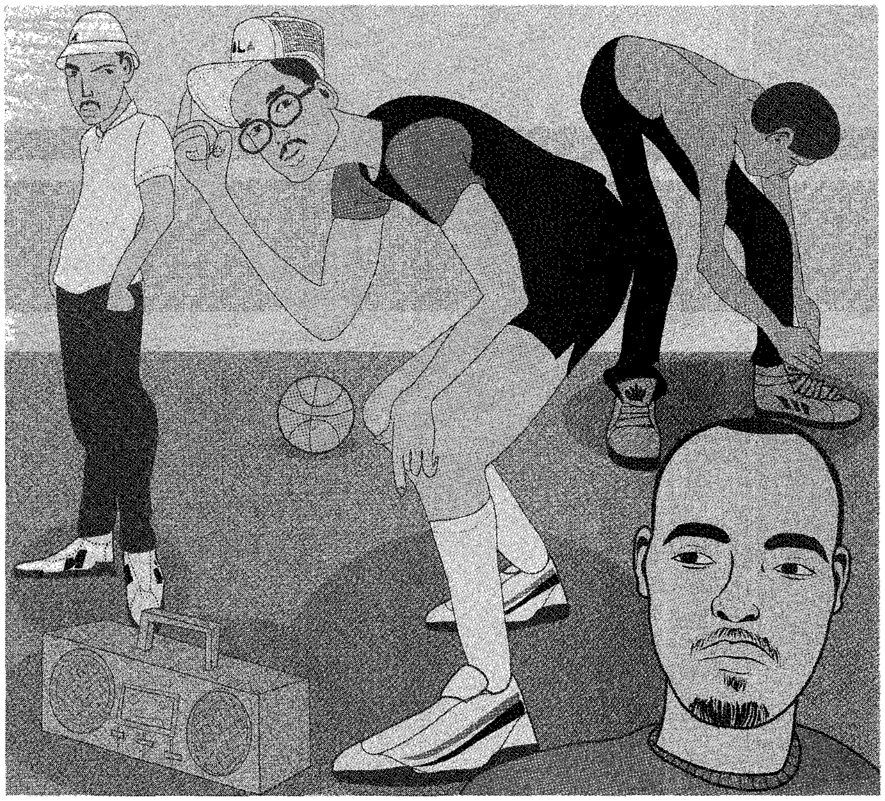
syncratic San Francisco artist Jess, whose surrealistic, multilayered collages influenced a generation of West Coast artists. Of considerable historical value is Gustav Klimt's "Portrait of a Lady Facing Front"; the sitter is most likely Adele Bloch-Bauer, better known as the subject of Klimt's famous "Gold Portrait." (7th Regiment Armory, Park Ave. at 66th St. 212-940-8925. Feb. 24-28.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC

OPERA

METROPOLITAN OPERA

Feb. 23 and Feb. 26 at 8: The final performances of **"Madama Butterfly,"** with Kallen Esperian, Maria Zifchak, Marco Berti, and Vassily Gerello; Emmanuel Villaume, an elegant interpreter of Mediterranean repertory, conducts. ♦ Feb. 24 at 8 and March 1 at 7:30: A revival of Saint-Saëns's **"Samson et Dalila"** features two magnetic young singers, José Cura and Denyce Graves, who have made specialties of the leading roles. Also with Jean-Philippe Lafont; Bertrand de Billy. ♦ Feb. 25 and Feb. 28 at 8: Franco Zeffirelli's deluxe 1987 production of **"Turandot,"** with Andrea Gruber (in the title role), Johan Botha, and Krassimira Stoyanova; de Billy. ♦ Feb. 26 at 1:30: Elijah Moshinsky's monumental production of Verdi's **"Nabucco,"** one of the triumphs of the 2000-01 season, has returned with its leading lady, Maria Guleghina (in the vocally bruising role of Abigaille), and with the Metropolitan Opera Chorus, which in the freedom hymn "Va, pensiero" becomes a collective star unto itself. Also with the formidable Wendy White, Nikolai Putilin, and Paata Burchuladze; James Levine. (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.)



Bobbito Garcia discusses vintage-sneaker culture at the Brooklyn Public Library.

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC

Lorin Maazel, often at his best in colorful French and Russian works, begins and ends his latest Philharmonic program with two masterworks of orchestral finesse: Dukas's "Sorcerer's Apprentice" and Rimsky-Korsakov's Orientalist fantasy "Scheherazade." The surprise is the American première of Ross Edwards's Oboe Concerto, which Maazel world-premièred with the Sydney Symphony Orchestra in 2002; it features the Australian oboist Diana Doherty, a trained dancer who is called upon to emerge in darkness from the wings and slink her way around the string section. (Feb. 24 at 7:30 and Feb. 25-26 at 8. ♦ Note: Maazel will also conduct a "rush hour" concert of the Dukas and Rimsky-Korsakov works on Feb. 23 at 6:45.) ♦ Everyone, it seems, has an opinion about Maazel's conducting, but his own compositions—written for such virtuosos as James Galway and Mstislav Rostropovich—remain something of a mystery. The première of his opera "1984," at Covent Garden in May, is the major event of his seventy-fifth-birthday year, but the Philharmonic is making its own contribution by presenting a one-night-only all-Maazel program, featuring Galway, the actors Dietlinde Turban (Maazel's wife) and Jeremy Irons, and the Brooklyn Youth Chorus. (March 1 at 7:30.) (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-875-5656.)

PHILHARMONIA BAROQUE ORCHESTRA

Nicholas McGegan, a jovial man with a serious passion for early music, has made this San Francisco group into one of the world's finest period-instrument bands. He brings it to Zankel Hall for a concert of orchestral and vocal works by Handel and Rameau, graced by the pinging soprano voice of Lisa Saffer. (212-247-7800. Feb. 23 at 7:30.)

AMERICAN COMPOSERS ORCHESTRA

New works by Ingram Marshall ("Dark Florescence," a double-guitar concerto featuring Andy Summers, formerly of the Police, and Benjamin Verdery) and Danny Elfman, two first-class Left Coast composers, highlight the orchestra's latest program; Steven Sloane conducts. (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. Feb. 23 at 8.)

FRENCH NATIONAL ORCHESTRA

Kurt Masur, who once upon a time whipped the New York Philharmonic back into shape, has done something similar with his new orchestra, which he has led since 2002. He conducts them in a program of works for piano and orchestra by Debussy and Ravel (both with Jean-Yves Thibaudet) as well as Rimsky-Korsakov's "Scheherazade." (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. Feb. 24 at 8.)

"MENDELSSOHN: A GENEROUS SPIRIT"

The gentlest voice among the early Romantic composers wafted some of his most captivating music through Shakespeare's "A Midsummer Night's Dream." Rarely performed with the play it was intended to accompany, it receives a fuller treatment from the Orchestra of the Age of the Enlightenment and the Chorus of the Enlightenment, conducted by the excellent Iván Fischer, and eight actors, who will perform semi-staged scenes from the play, directed by Tim Carroll of London's Globe Theatre. (Alice Tully Hall. 212-721-6500. Feb. 24 at 8.)

UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS WIND ENSEMBLE

The Austin-based symphonic band offers music by Handel, Copland, and Corigliano (see This Week). (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. Feb. 27 at 2.)

MUSICA SACRA

Richard Westenburg's fine professional chorus, with orchestra, offers music by Bach (the Magnificat) and Mozart (including the "Ave verum corpus"). (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. March 1 at 8.)

RECITALS

PRO MUSICIS FOUNDATION

Sonatas for violin and piano by Debussy, Brahms, and Paul Moravec are featured in a performance by the violinist Maria Bachmann and the pianist Jon Klibonoff, who share the program with the soprano-guitar duo of Elizabeth Parcells and Felix Justen. (Weill Recital Hall, Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. Feb. 23 at 8.)

NEW YORK FESTIVAL OF SONG:
"AT HARLEM'S HEIGHT"

Steven Blier's movable feast of vocal music takes a detour into jazz territory as Blier, on piano, teams up with the soprano Dana Hanchard, the tenor Darius de Haas, and the baritone James Martin for an evening of music by Ellington, Strayhorn, Handy, and Blake, along with art songs by William Grant Still and Florence Price. (Rose Theatre, Broadway at 60th St. 212-721-6500. Feb. 23 at 8.)

CHAMBER MUSIC SOCIETY
OF LINCOLN CENTER

Feb. 23 at 8: The soprano Susan Narucki joins the Orion String Quartet for Schoenberg's majestic String Quartet No. 2 in F-Sharp Minor, at once a farewell to the nineteenth century and an embrace of the twentieth's possibilities. Also with quartets by Haydn (in G Major, Op. 77, No. 1) and Ravel. ♦ March 1 at 7:30: Paquito D'Rivera, the exciting Cuban clarinettist, joins the versatile Imani Winds for a program that bounces between the worlds of classical (Janáček's "Youth" and an arrangement of Ravel's "Le Tombeau de Couperin") and Latin contemporary music (Piazzolla's "Liber Tango" and the New York première of D'Rivera's "Kites Over Havana"). (Alice Tully Hall. 212-875-5788.)

PER TENGSTRAND

The stylish Swedish pianist offers a concert of music by Stenhammar, Glazunov, and Esa-Pekka Salonen. (Scandinavia House, 58 Park Ave. 212-847-9740. Feb. 24 at 7:30.)

BARGEMUSIC

Feb. 24-25 at 7:30: The pianist Sergey Schepkin performs works by Bach (including the Italian Concerto), Scriabin, and Debussy. ♦ Feb. 26 at 7:30 and Feb. 27 at 4: The violinist Mark Peskanov joins friends for piano trios by Rachmaninoff and Shostakovich. (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-2083.)

PACIFICA QUARTET

The daring young string quartet, which can turn from Mozart to Carter with aplomb, comes to Miller Theatre for one of those intrepid programs that only George Steel could devise—the surviving quartets of Nicolai Roslavets, an early-Soviet renegade whose works bridge the gap between the sensuality of Scriabin and the brittle intellectuality of Schoenberg. The soprano Elizabeth Farnum and the pianist Margaret Kampmeier are also on hand for some songs and piano pieces. (Columbia University, Broadway at 116th St. 212-854-7799. Feb. 25 at 8.)

MAXIMILIAN BODE

LOCRIAN CHAMBER PLAYERS
The group, devoted to works written in the last ten years, offers music by Julia Wolfe ("Dig Deep," a rough and vital rock-laced string quartet), Paul Chihara, and Julian Anderson, Harvard's new professor of composition. (Riverside Church, 10th fl., enter at 91 Claremont Ave. Feb. 25 at 8. No tickets required.)

MUSIC AT THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Feb. 25 at 8: Musicians from Marlboro, a mix of the school's brilliant faculty and star students, offers music by Mozart (the String Quintets in B-Flat Major and G Minor) and Hindemith in Grace Rainey Rogers Auditorium. ♦ Feb. 28 at 8: Members of the New York Collegium, led by their eminent director, Andrew Parrott, perform music from the Gonzaga court of Mantua in the Medieval Sculpture Hall, in conjunction with the Museum's current Rubens exhibition. (Fifth Ave. at 83rd St. 212-570-3949.)

PRISM SAXOPHONE QUARTET
From France came the classical saxophone, a heritage that this excellent group honors in "Le Saxophone Spectrale," a program of cutting-edge works by Gerard Grisey, Philippe Hurel, and Fabian Levy. (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. 212-864-5400. Feb. 25 at 8:30.)

MET CHAMBER ENSEMBLE
James Levine, extending his lush Romantic pale around the most bracing modern works, performs as pianist in a program of music by Schubert, Schumann, Kurtág, and Harbison, along with the chamber concertos of Ligeti and Berg. (Zankel Hall. 212-247-7800. Feb. 27 at 5.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

"WHERE'D YOU GET THOSE?"
Bobbito Garcia has been many things: a music columnist (for *Vibe*), a performer (as DJ Cucumberslice), a hip-hop radio host (on WKCR for much of the nineties), an entrepreneur (he once had a store called Bobbito's Footwork), and a basketball player (on rough-and-tumble playgrounds and at glitzy N.B.A. halftime shows). But all his activities have one thing in common, and that thing can be found on his feet. Bobbito is a self-described "reformed sneaker fiend." The thirty-eight-year-old native New Yorker explains the depth of his passions in "Where'd You Get Those?," a captivating book chronicling local sneaker culture from 1960 to 1987. On Feb. 23 at 7, Garcia brings the story to life with a multimedia presentation featuring images of Stan Smiths, suede Pumas, and Nike Air Forces, in action and "on ice." (Central Library, Brooklyn Public Library, Grand Army Plaza. For more information, call 718-230-2100.)

READINGS
Feb. 24 at 7: A night of film and fiction to benefit tsunami victims in Sri Lanka, featuring scenes from "Haro Hara: Pilgrimage to Kataragama," a documentary by Sam Holt, and a reading of short fiction by Tom Beer. (The Drawing Center, 35 Wooster St. Tickets at the door.) ♦ Feb. 24 at 7: The Columbia M.F.A. students Gordon Haber, Chris Hacker, and Jessica Lamb-Shapiro read from their work. (K.G.B., 85 E. 4th St. No tickets necessary.) ♦ Feb. 28 at 6: Annie Proulx, Malinda McCollum, Jeremy Glazier, and Danielle Pieratti read from their contributions to *The Paris Review*. (The Culture Project, 45 Bleecker St. For more information, call 212-879-1375.)

TALKS
Feb. 24 at 7:30: The "Little Gray Book" lecture series returns to Galapagos with a tongue-in-cheek take on how best to observe Presidents' Day. The participants include Joshuah Bearman, Jon Langford, Sarah Vowell, Ken Smith, and John Hodgman. At the end of the event, the irrepressibly entertaining Hungry March Band takes over the club. (70 N. 6th St., Williamsburg, Brooklyn. 718-782-5188.) ♦ Feb. 25 at 7:30: The rock critic Ann Powers discusses her new book, "Tori Amos: Piece by Piece," with the journalist Katherine Lanpher. (Lolita, 266 Broome St. No tickets necessary.) ♦ Feb. 28 at 6: The journalist Sebastian Junger talks about his book "The Perfect Storm" and about his experiences in Afghanistan. (The Explorers Club, 46 E. 70th St. Tickets at the door.)

"The Met show is sublime." *Michael Kimmelman, The New York Times*

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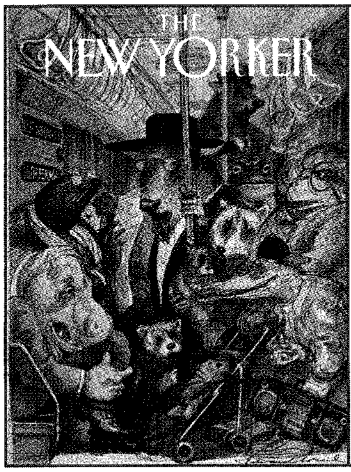

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by Edward Sorel
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MOVIES OPENING

CURSED
A werewolf movie directed by Wes Craven and written by Kevin Williamson, the creators of "Scream." With Christina Ricci, Jesse Eisenberg, and Joshua Jackson. Opening Feb. 25.

DIARY OF A MAD BLACK WOMAN
Kimberly Elise plays a divorcée who puts her life back together after her husband, a wealthy Atlanta attorney, leaves her with nothing. Tyler Perry wrote the script and, while cross-dressed, plays a grandmotherly friend. Opening Feb. 25.

MAN OF THE HOUSE
In a comedy directed by Stephen Herek, a Texas Ranger (Tommy Lee Jones) moves in with a group of college cheerleaders who witnessed a murder. Opening Feb. 25.

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE STREET
A lonely woman (Fernanda Montenegro) in Rio de Janeiro gets involved with a retired judge (Raul Cortez) who may also be a criminal. Directed by Marcos Bernstein. In Portuguese. Opening Feb. 25. (Quad Cinema.)

10 ON TEN
A documentary by the Iranian filmmaker Abbas Kiarostami, in which he breaks down his theory of filmmaking into ten chapters. In Farsi. Opening Feb. 25. (Anthology Film Archives.)

UP AND DOWN
A social comedy that entwines three stories around the illegal purchase of a baby from a Prague pawnshop. Directed by Jan Hrebejk ("Divided We Fall"). In Czech. Opening Feb. 25. (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Quad Cinema.)

FILM NOTES

THE AVIATOR
The billionaire madman, the taloned hermit of Las Vegas eating nothing but steak and peas—that was the haggard face in the tabloids that millions of us knew in the years before Howard Hughes's death, in 1976. Martin Scorsese's brilliantly entertaining movie goes back to the period when Hughes (Leonardo DiCaprio) was an exhilaratingly handsome and daring young man. The narrative, concocted by the screenwriter John Logan, is not meant to be taken literally. It's a fantasia about a studly capitalist prince who produces and directs movies, designs and flies airplanes, and sleeps with dozens of beautiful actresses and starlets. Scorsese and the designer Dante Ferretti press the young tycoon into the svelte Art Deco look of the period; in his tuxedos and casual beige flying duds, Hughes becomes the pictorial embodiment of restless bravado. Toward the end, there are glimpses of the germ-haunted paranoid that Hughes would become, but the movie is consistently lighthearted and engaging, a sort of pop "Citizen Kane." With Cate Blanchett doing a nervy imitation of Katharine Hepburn.—*David Denby* (Reviewed in our issue of 12/20 & 27/04.) (Battery Park 11, Chelsea Cinemas, Cinema 1, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, 34th Street Theatre, and Union Square.)

BORN INTO BROTHELS
Watching Zana Briski and Ross Kauffman's prizewinning documentary, shot in Calcutta's Sonagachi red-light district, where Briski lived, on and off, for years, one is initially held by the sensuousness of the colors and the beauty of the children—the offspring of prostitutes, eight, nine, twelve years old, who are growing up in the district and are surely heading into prostitution themselves. Then the "plot" of the movie kicks in. Briski gives the children cameras and teaches them to take pictures of their surroundings; they gain a sense of themselves, and they master a craft. But will Briski be able to get them out of the brothels (where their parents need them for economic reasons) and into decent schools? One is aware of Briski as a rather aggressive guardian angel from the West, who comes in and tries to save only a few children, but she's hardheaded and effective, and her quest makes sense.—*D.D.* (Chelsea Cinemas, Metro Twin, and Village East Cinemas.)

SOUND
SCENE
TAKE
1
2
3
PROD
Etc...

DOWNFALL
The great Swiss-German actor Bruno Ganz gives a staggering performance as Adolf Hitler in this full-scale realist German production detailing the last ten days of the Third Reich. As the Red Army rampages through Berlin, Hitler and his staff have retreated to the bunker under the Reich Chancellery. They are all here—Himmler, Goebbels, Speer, the entire fascinating, loathsome crew of commanders, mad visionaries, and toadies (all brilliantly acted)—and, leading them still, a man so physically ill and constricted in movement that he looks like a broken-down puppet from a Bavarian travelling circus. The puppet comes to life, of course, in appalling self-pitying rants that are borderline funny. The entire movie teeters on the edge of sick comedy—in particular such scenes as the death of the Goebbels children, one by one, at the hands of their mother—and at times one longs for a coldly malicious ironist like Brecht or Fassbinder to come in and take over. The attempt to re-create Hitler in realistic terms has always been morally and imaginatively questionable—a compromise with the unspeakable that borders on complicity with it. Produced and written by Bernd Eichinger; directed by Oliver Hirschbiegel. In German.—*D.D.* (2/14 & 21/05) (Film Forum.)

FINDING NEVERLAND
Marc Forster, the director who brought us "Monster's Ball," has turned his attention—as one does—from Halle Berry to J. M. Barrie. The diminutive Scottish author is played by Johnny Depp, in a loose fantasia on the genesis of "Peter Pan." Barrie meets some young boys in a London park, and from his friendship with them and their widowed mother (Kate Winslet) he conjures a story of a child who cannot, or will not, grow up. The fact that the film takes liberties with the historical record (there were five brothers, for instance, not four) is a minor affair; more misguided is the reliance on whimsy, at moments where the real Barrie was straightforward, even chilly, in his imaginings. At other times, however, the movie's air of slightness and evanescence feels touching and right, and, if the result strikes you as too weepy for its own good, consider that the actual story of Barrie and his "Lost Boys"—some of whom met untimely deaths—was worse and more troubling by far. With Julie Christie, Dustin Hoffman, and, in the role of a real Peter, the clear and unsentimental Freddie Highmore.—*Anthony Lane* (Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, New York Twin, 19th Street East 6, 34th Street Theatre, and Village Theatre VII.)

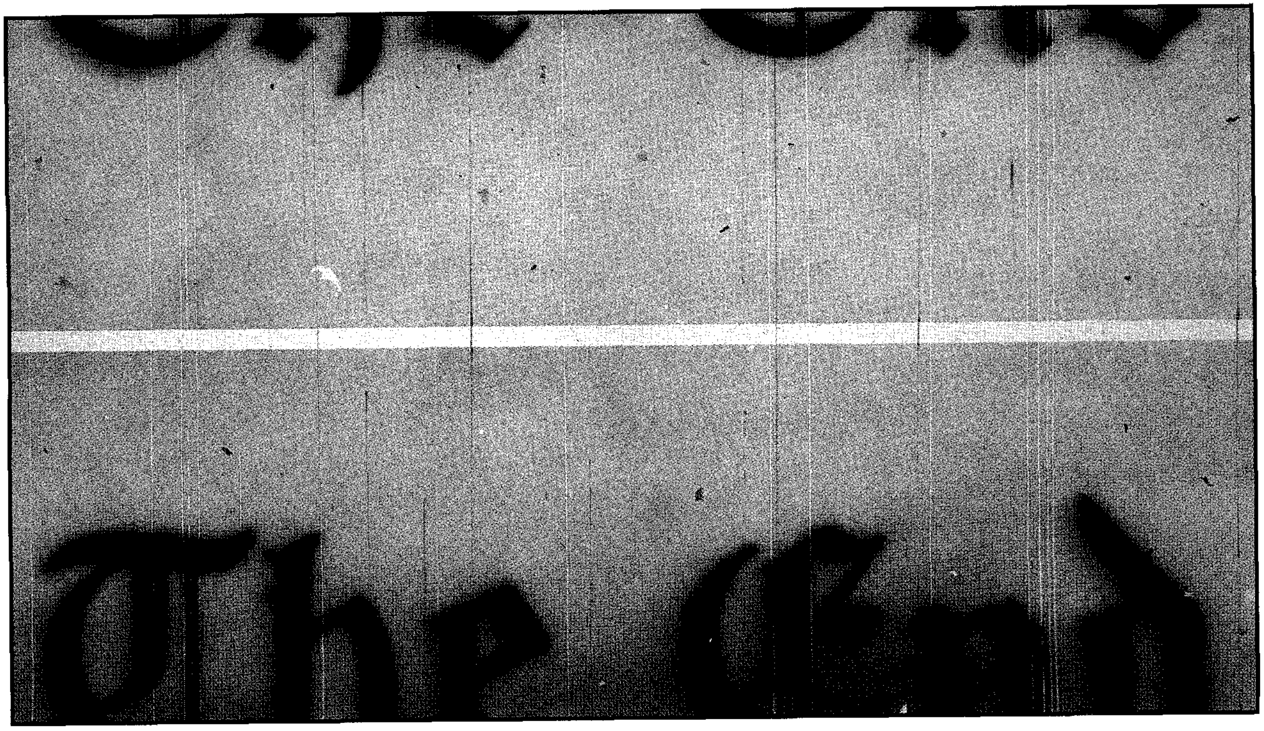
HITCH
Smiling at a woman, his eyes crinkling, the actor Will Smith bears an uncanny resemblance to Bill Clinton. In this modern screwball comedy, Smith exerts his considerable charm as a swift, super-knowing "date doctor" who advises men of less than extraordinary appearance how to woo the women of their dreams. Some of his advice is cornball stuff, and some of it narrowly practical and probably true (if she fiddles with her keys at her doorstep, she wants to be kissed). Smith's principal student is a heavy-set accountant, played by the TV-comedy actor Kevin James, who is light on his feet in the tradition of such buoyant heavies as Zero Mostel and Jackie Gleason and possibly just as talented as those two. James's scenes with Smith and with Amber Valletta, who plays a bored heiress, are full of surprises. The movie is too long for what it has to say, but much of it is good-hearted fun. Stay for the dance sequence at the very end. Written by Kevin Bisch; directed by Andy Tennant.—*D.D.* (Battery Park 11, Chelsea Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Orpheum VII, 64th and 2nd, 34th Street Theatre, and Union Square.)

HOTEL RWANDA
Paul Rusesabagina (Don Cheadle), the Rwandan manager of the four-star Hôtel des Mille Collines, in Kigali, wears a blue suit and tie and is very polite, even deferential, toward everyone. Paul works for the Belgian company that owns the hotel, which has become an oasis for Europeans and for African élites. When the Hutu massacres of the Tutsi minority begin, in the spring of 1994, Paul keeps the Mille Collines running. He also, on the sly, establishes it as a haven for both Hutu and Tutsi fugitives, keeping them momentarily safe from the machete-wielding militia, who kill eight hundred thousand people in a few months. Working in Rwanda and South Africa, the writer-director, Terry George, convincingly stages the horrors outside the hotel: the paralyzing fear in the night, the vilely inciting radio broadcasts, the chaos and arbitrary madness of the slaughter. But the true drama of "Hotel Rwanda" lies in the character of Paul, who is betrayed by the Europeans who formed him but who holds to his belief in civility, right through the worst disasters. The movie is a triumph for Cheadle—he never steps outside the character for emotional grandstanding or easy moralism.—*D.D.* (12/20 & 27/04) (Angelika Film Center, BAM Rose Cinemas, Battery Park 11, East 86th Street Cinemas, Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, Lincoln Square, and 19th Street East 6.)

INSIDE DEEP THROAT
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (42nd Street E Walk and Sunshine Cinema.)

MILLION DOLLAR BABY
Much of Clint Eastwood's evocative and poetic boxing movie is set in the Hit Pit, a moldy, sweat-stained downtown Los Angeles gym in which crusty veterans train a few serious fighters and many hapless punks. Scrap (Morgan Freeman), an ex-fighter with one functioning eye, works at the gym and exchanges affectionately nasty remarks with the owner, one Frankie Dunn (Eastwood). Against his better judgment, Frankie agrees to take on a tough country woman, Maggie Fitzgerald (Hilary Swank), who, not entirely to our surprise, rapidly becomes the hottest fighter in the sordid but lucrative world of women's boxing. The story, adapted by Paul Haggis from F. X. Toole's collection, "Rope Burns," is borderline trite, but the movie has the sweet melancholy of a great jazz piece.—*D.D.* (12/20 & 27/04) (Angelika Film Center, Battery Park 11, Chelsea Cinemas, Cinema 1, East 86th Street Cinemas, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, and 34th Street Theatre.)

NOBODY KNOWS
A long bad dream of a movie from the Japanese director Hirokazu Kore-eda, who created the masterly "After Life." This new project takes its inspiration, loosely, from a true case of parental neglect. A young mother, with the voice of a doll, and a blank space where her sense of responsibility is meant to be, walks out on her four young children, leaving them to run their own lives. The film charts their slow decline, from the first manly efforts of twelve-year-old Akira (Yûya Yagira) to oversee a regular home to the draining away of essential supplies, and on to a final calamity. Like the children themselves, the film is immune to panic or complaint; events unfold in a patient procession of detail, and the camera's scrutiny of faces, feet, and ordinary objects is so obsessive that we seem to be following not so much a domestic drama as the progress of a haunting. Some viewers will never shake off the creepy dismay; others may find that the thickening air of isolation and implausibility leaves them nothing but numb. In Japanese.—*A.L.* (2/7/05) (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Sunshine Cinema.)



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THE NOMI SONG
Operatic in pitch and flow, the German-born singer Klaus Nomi was an underground sensation on the performance-art scene of the late seventies and early eighties. His songs, equally influenced by David Bowie and Maria Callas, along with his Kabuki-like performances of them, had a tragic glamour that stayed well away from camp. Andrew Horn's documentary is, like Nomi, arch and arty, and presents his performances in all their mesmerizing intensity.—*Bruce Diones* (Cinema Village.)

ONG BAK: THE THAI WARRIOR
After the Ong Bak (a statue of Buddha) is stolen from a small village in Thailand by an art thief, a villager (Tony Jaa) takes on the mission to retrieve it. This martial-arts picture (it features a fighting style known as Muay Thai that looks extremely hard on the elbows and knees) follows the conventions of the genre: a gang of tough guys, a colorful ringleader, and girls with shrill voices all try to stop the hero from achieving his goal. What distinguishes this film from many others is the breathtaking talents of Jaa. Without the use of wirework, and with no regard for his own well-being, he flies through the air in feats of derring-do so striking that the director (Prachya Pinkaew) has the good sense to replay them in slow motion. In Thai.—*B.D.* (84th Street Sixplex, Empire 25, 34th Street Theatre, and Union Square.)

QUAI DES ORFÈVRES
A stunningly well-made entertainment, this 1947 detective film by Henri-Georges Clouzot features the master actor Louis Jouvet in the role of a police inspector. His world is contrasted with that of the music hall, represented by the full-blown, hypersexual Suzy Delair. When this voluptuous slut sings "Avec Son Tra-La-La," she may make you wonder if the higher things in life are worth the trouble. With Bernard Blier as Delair's worshipful-masochist husband, Charles Dullin in the role of a lecherous hunchback, and, as a lesbian photographer, Simone Renant, at the time said to be the most beautiful actress in Paris. In French.—*Pauline Kael* (BAM Rose Cinemas; Feb. 27.)

SHANE
The Western stranger in town consciously turned into Galahad on the range. Superficially, this 1953 film is a Western, but from Shane's knightly costume, from the way his horse canters, from the Agincourt music, it's all too recognizable as an attempt to create a myth. With chivalric purity as his motivation, the enigmatic Shane (Alan Ladd) defeats enemies twice his size—the largest is the Prince of Darkness himself, Jack Palance. The earth-loving Wyoming homesteaders befriended by Shane include Van Heflin, Jean Arthur as his wife, and Brandon deWilde as their child. This George Stevens film is overplanned and uninspired: Westerns are better when they're not so self-importantly self-conscious. However, audiences wept over the scene in which a dog mourns at his master's coffin, and Jean Arthur's farewell handshake to Shane—whom she loves—brought forth sniffles. Brandon deWilde's final cry, "Shane," was heard for years wherever kids played.—*P.K.* (Museum of Modern Art; Feb. 27.)

THE SMALL BACK ROOM
The writing-producing-directing team of Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger pioneered the human-ticking-time-bomb film—in which you wait for the central character to explode—in this 1949 picture that also features many actual bombs. Set in wartime London, six years earlier, it's about a brooding bomb-disposal expert (David Farrar) with a tin foot, substance-abuse problems, troubles at work, and a gal (Kathleen York) he suspects of pitying him as much as she loves him. The movie has been called gloomy, but it's saved by a stewing tension that doesn't let up. It also boasts a couple of memorable set pieces: an expressionist scene of the hero in a panic, imagining that a giant whiskey bottle is bearing down on him, and a realistic one of the defusing of a bomb that equals in suspense any of the climaxes in the British TV series "Danger UXB," thirty years later.—*Michael Sragow* (BAM Rose Cinemas; Feb. 23.)

TEN
The Iranian director Abbas Kiarostami shot this 2003 film after his documentary about Ugandan street children, in which he delighted in the portability and intimacy of the digital camera. In this revelatory work, he reverses course and fixes his camera to the dashboard of a car driven by a beautiful, unnamed divorcée (Mania Akbari) as she navigates the streets of Tehran. It's a postmodern gesture: a movie seemingly without a director, a drama that's also a documentary. (The streets are real, but the conversations are scripted.) The talk centers on the corseted lives of women in modern Iran, and the cross-cultural similarities can be striking: take away the head scarves and these women could be Connecticut housewives. There are many piercing moments, and Kiarostami's minimalist methods enhance a palpable sense of frustrated lives. Ironically, for a film about hidden women, the natural performance by Amin (Amin Maher), the ten-year-old son of the divorcée, reveals the most about their situation. He rants and whines, directing precocious, cutting insults at his mother, unaware of the punches he's landing. In Farsi.—*Michael Agger* (Anthology Film Archives; Feb. 25-March 1.)

At BAM Rose Cinemas, the 1949 ticking-time-bomb thriller "The Small Back Room."

TURTLES CAN FLY
The first impressive thing about Bahman Ghobadi's movie is that it got made at all. Not many directors, perhaps, would choose to film in the Kurdish encampments of northern Iraq, where life has been a mix of the ramshackle, the uncertain, and the downright lethal. The story is set in the days before the arrival of American forces in 2003—a cause of much rumor and hope. Satellite (Soran Ebrahim) is a boy of thirteen, but he has grown old before his time, and everybody in the village, adults as well as children, relies on his initiative. This is a world of losses: adults who have lost authority, and children who have lost parents and limbs. We watch Satellite as, true to his name, he brings television (and therefore news of war) to a clamoring community, and, far worse, we watch the teen-age Agrin (Avaz Latif) try, with awful persistence, to put a stop to her own suffering and to that of her illegitimate child. All this should be grim beyond bearing, yet the film treads carefully, and even lightly, through its tribulations. Never has childhood seemed more weirdly resilient, or less cute. In Kurdish.—*A.L.* (2/7/05) (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

WINGS
In his bristling yet heart-tugging adventure, William Wellman, a First World War pilot himself, took such care with the aerial combat—for instance, making sure to silhouette dogfights against deep clouds—that it seems three-dimensional. He also contrasted shots of plane-to-plane jousting, the last haven of chivalry left in modern warfare, with scenes of ground-to-air attacks and trench and tank warfare that have a bone-crushing realism. He even frames the buddy story at the core, about a stolid rich guy (Richard Arlen) and a febrile hot-rodder (Buddy Rogers), as the last hurrah of sentiment for a roughed-up generation. With his raw, kinetic style, Wellman had a knack for making his actors reveal their emotional core. Clara Bow, as Rogers's unappreciated girl next door, steals every scene she's in with her yearning energy, and the supporting cast is full of surprises, like Henry B. Walthall's affecting performance as Arlen's wheelchair-bound father and Gary Cooper's marvellous, laconic cameo as a fatalistic cadet. John Monk Saunders wrote the story; Hope Loring and Louis D. Lighton wrote the script. Released in 1927, "Wings" was the first film to win the Academy Award for Best Picture. Silent.—*M.S.* (Film Forum; Feb. 25-26.)

ALSO PLAYING

CONSTANTINE
Battery Park 11, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, 64th and 2nd, 34th Street Theatre, and Village Theatre VII.

IMAGINARY HEROES
Angelika Film Center and Empire 25.

IN GOOD COMPANY
Battery Park 11, Beekman, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, and Village Theatre VII.

THE MERCHANT OF VENICE (1/3/05)
BAM Rose Cinemas, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, 72nd Street East, and Village East Cinemas.
MY MOTHER'S SMILE
Cinema Village and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.
SIDEWAYS (10/25/04)
BAM Rose Cinemas, Battery Park 11, Chelsea Cinemas, East 85th Street, Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, 34th Street Theatre, and Union Square.

THEATRE ADDRESSES

Unless noted, call 212-777-FILM for show times.

Angelika Film Center, 18 W. Houston St.
BAM Rose Cinemas, 30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn.
Battery Park 11, West St. at Vesey St.
Beekman, Second Ave. at 66th St.
Chelsea Cinemas, 260 W. 23rd St.
Chelsea West, 333 W. 23rd St.
Cinemas 1, 2, and 3, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema Village, 22 E. 12th St. (212-924-3363).
East 86th Street Cinemas, Third Ave. at 86th St.
84th Street Sixplex, Broadway at 84th St.
Empire 25, on 42nd St. near Eighth Ave. (212-398-3939).
Film Forum, W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110).
First & 62nd Cinemas, 400 E. 62nd St.
42nd Street E Walk, 42nd St. near Eighth Ave.
Kips Bay Theatre, Second Ave. at 32nd St.
Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, Broadway at 63rd St. (212-757-2280).
Lincoln Square, Broadway at 68th St.
MetroTwin, Broadway at 99th St.
New York Twin, Second Ave. at 66th St.
19th Street East 6, Broadway at 19th St.
Orpheum VII, Third Ave. at 86th St.
Paris, 4 W. 58th St. (212-688-3800).
Pioneer Theatre, 155 E. 3rd St. (212-254-3300).
Quad Cinema, 34 W. 13th St.
72nd Street East, Third Ave. at 71st St.
64th and 2nd, Second Ave. at 64th St.
62nd & Broadway, 62 W. 62nd St.
Sunshine Cinema, 143 E. Houston St. (212-330-8182).
34th Street Theatre, 312 W. 34th St.
Union Square, Broadway at 13th St.
Village East Cinemas, Second Ave. at 12th St.
Village Theatre VII, Third Ave. at 11th St.
Ziegfeld, 141 W. 54th St.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES
32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (212-505-5110)—"After Exodus: Films of the Black Jewish Diaspora." Feb. 24 at 7, Feb. 26 at 9:30, and Feb. 27 at 6:30: "The Unshod Man" (2003, Laurence Attali) and "Black Israel" (2003, Maurice Dores). ♦ Feb. 24 at 9, Feb. 26 at 4:30, and Feb. 27 at 8:30: "Caravan 841" (2001, Zion Rubin) and "Sister-Wife" (2000, Hadar Kleoman and Timma Goldstein). ♦ Feb. 25 at 7:30: "The Commandment Keepers" (2005, Marlaine Gliksman). ♦ Feb. 25 at 9:30, Feb. 26 at 7:30, and Feb. 27 at 4:30: "Outcry" (2003, Destau Damto) and "Menelik: Black Jewish Prince" (1999, Daniel Wachsmann). ♦ The *Onion* Film Series. Feb. 24 at 8: "24 Hour Party People" (2002, Michael Winterbottom). ♦ Repertory screening. Feb. 25 at 7, Feb. 26-27 at 3 and 7 and Feb. 28 and March 1 at 7 and 9: "Ten" (†).
BAM ROSE CINEMAS
30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-777-3456)—Repertory favorites. Feb. 23 at 7:30: "The Small Back Room" (†), followed by an interview with the director Michael Powell's wife and film editor, Thelma Schoonmaker. ♦ An Henri-Georges Clouzot retrospective. All films are in French. Feb. 24 at 7:30: "La Vérité" (1960). ♦ Feb. 25 at 2, 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "Manon" (1949). ♦ Feb. 26 at 2, 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "Diabolique" (1955). ♦ Feb. 27 at 2, 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "Quai des Orfèvres" (†). ♦ "Fright Nights." Feb. 28 at 7:30: "Häxan" (1922, Benjamin Christensen). ♦ March 1 at 6:50 and 9:15: "The Car" (1977, Elliot Silverstein).
FILM FORUM
W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110)—Feb. 23-24 at 1:10, 3:15, 5:30, 7:35, and 9:40: "Masculine Feminine" (1966, Jean-Luc Godard; in French). ♦ Through March 3: "Oscar's First Year: Academy Award Winners 1927-28." Feb. 25-26 at 2 and 7: "Wings" (†). ♦ Feb. 25-26 at 4:40 and 9:35: "Seventh Heaven" (1927, Frank Borzage). ♦ Feb. 27 at 1:40, 5:30, and 9:20 and Feb. 28 at 1:40 and 5:30: "Sunrise" (1927, F. W. Murnau). ♦ Feb. 27 at 3:30 and 7:20 and Feb. 28 at 3:30: "The Crowd" (1928, King Vidor). ♦ March 1 at 1:30, 5:20, and 9:10: "Street Walker" (1928, Borzage). ♦ March 1 at 3:30 and 7:20: "The Last Command" (1928, Josef von Sternberg). ♦ Special event. Feb. 28 at 8: An evening with the screen and dance star Marge Champion.
FLORENCE GOULD HALL
55 E. 59th St. (212-355-6160)—Films about Paris. March 1 at 12:30, 4, and 7: "Entr'acte" (1924, René Clair; in French) and four other shorts.
MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9480)—Feb. 23 at 6: "We Shall Overcome" (2004, Dave Thoudam) and "The Ladies' Room" (2003, Mahnaz Afzali). ♦ Feb. 23 at 7:30 and Feb. 26 at 5:30: "Paradise Lost" (2003, Ebtisam Mra'ana; in Hebrew and Arabic). ♦ Feb. 23 at 8:30: "Umbrellas" (1995, Henry Corra et al.). ♦ Feb. 24 at 5:30: "Frames" (2003, Corra). ♦ Feb. 24 at 6: "George Stevens: A Filmmaker's Journey" (1985, George Stevens, Jr.). ♦ Feb. 24 at 8 and Feb. 25 at 5:30: "Alias Kurban Said" (2004, Jos de Putter). ♦ Feb. 24 at 8:15 and Feb. 26 at 2: "Looking for Sally" (1925, Leo McCarey). ♦ Feb. 25 at 6: "Woman of the Year" (1942, George Stevens). ♦ Feb. 25 at 7:30 and Feb. 28 at 5:30: "Texas-Kabul" (2004, Helga Reidemeister). ♦ Feb. 25 at 8:15: "I Remember Mama" (1948, Stevens). ♦ Feb. 26 at 2: "Cattle Callers" (2003, Marilla Rocha). ♦ Feb. 26 at 4: "Alice Adams" (1935, Stevens). ♦ Feb. 26 at 4: "Thunder in Guyana" (2003, Suzanne Wasserman). ♦ Feb. 26 at 6:15: "A Damsel in Distress" (1937, Stevens). ♦ Feb. 26 at 8: "Jockey" (2003, Kate Davis). ♦ Feb. 26 at 8:15: "A Place in the Sun" (1951, Stevens). ♦ Feb. 27 at 2: "Shane" (†). ♦ Feb. 27 at 2: "Beer and Hankies" (2001, Julia Barco). ♦ Feb. 27 at 3:45: "Edit" (2003, Changjae Lee; in Korean). ♦ Feb. 27 at 5:30: "Repatriation" (2003, Kim Dong-won; in Korean). ♦ "Great Collaborations." Feb. 28 at 8: An interview with Richard Linklater and Ethan Hawke.
MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE
35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—Special event. Feb. 25 at 7:30: "Carmen and Geoffrey" (2004, Linda Atkinson and Nick Doob), with the artists Carmen De Lavallade and Geoffrey Holder in person. ♦ Through March 5: "Digital Masters." Feb. 26 at 2: "Russian Ark" (2002, Alexander Sokurov; in Russian). ♦ Feb. 26 at 4: "Time Code" (2000, Mike Figgis). ♦ Feb. 27 at 2: "The Lady and the Duke" (2001, Eric Rohmer; in French). ♦ Feb. 27 at 4:30: "The Gleaners and I" (2000, Agnès Varda; in French). ♦ Repertory nights. Feb. 26-27 at 6:30: "The Marquise of O" (1976, Rohmer; in French).
SUNSHINE CINEMA
143 E. Houston St. (212-330-8182)—Midnight movies. Feb. 25-26: "Stop Making Sense" (1984, Jonathan Demme).
WALTER READE THEATRE
Lincoln Center (212-875-5600)—Through Feb. 24: "*Film Comment* Selects." Feb. 23 at 1 and 9: "Memories of a Murder" (2003, Bong Joon-ho; in Korean). ♦ Feb. 24 at 1: "Route 181: Fragments on a Journey in Palestine-Israel" (2004, Eyal Silvan and Michel Kheifi). ♦ Through March 10: "Take No Prisoners: The Bold Vision of Kira Muratova." All films are in Russian. Feb. 25 at 2, Feb. 27 at 1 and 8, and March 1 at 4: "Brief Encounters" (1964). ♦ Feb. 25 at 4 and Feb. 27 at 3: "Long Farewells" (1971). ♦ Feb. 25 at 6:15 and Feb. 26 at 8: "The Tuner" (2004). ♦ Feb. 26 at 2 and Feb. 27 at 5: "The Aesthenic Syndrome" (1989). ♦ Feb. 26 at 5:45: "Three Stories" (1997).

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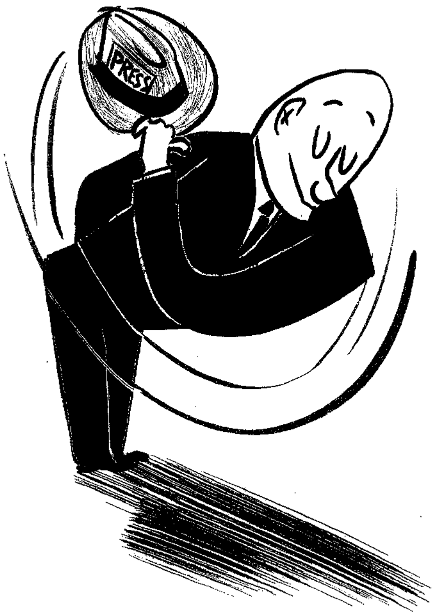
THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT
NEWSHOUNDS

"Mr. President," George W. Bush was asked at a press conference on January 26th, "do you think it's a proper use of government funds to pay commentators to promote your policies?"

"No," the President replied. "I expect my cabinet secretaries to make sure that that practice doesn't go forward," he elaborated. "Our agenda ought to be able to stand on its own two feet. I'm confident you'll be, over the course of the next four years, willing to give our different policies an objective look—won't you?" Then came the smirk, which has been making a post-election comeback. "Yes, I can see that."

The assurance, if not the smirk, was in order, because, until "that practice" came to light, using government funds to pay commentators to promote the Administration's policies seems to have been very much on its agenda. As *USA Today* had revealed a couple of weeks earlier, Armstrong Williams, a syndicated columnist (until his syndicate dropped him) and frequent cable-news talking head, got two hundred and forty-one thousand dollars from the Department of Education to shill for Bush's No Child Left Behind program. On the day of Bush's press conference, the Washington *Post* reported that Maggie Gallagher, a somewhat less widely syndicated columnist and "marriage expert" (who isn't?), had pocketed forty-one thousand five hundred taxpayer dollars for doing various chores on behalf of Bush's sexual-abstinence and marriage-promotion programs, such as ghosting an article under the byline of an assistant secretary of Health and Human Services in *Crisis*, a conservative Catholic magazine whose publisher, Deal W. Hudson, was the "Catholic outreach adviser" to the Bush reëlection campaign. (Later, after allegations of sexual harassment against Hudson came to light, he left the campaign and the magazine.) Finally, the day after the Gallagher disclosures, *USA Today* reported that yet another right-wing marriage expert slash syndicated columnist, Michael McManus, had been performing similar tasks for H.H.S., and more cheaply—he collected only ten grand. It appears that Gallagher and McManus, unlike Williams, were not explicitly required to use their columns to puff the government programs that were paying them, but it didn't hurt. Some observers were reminded of an old Fleet Street ditty:



> You cannot hope to bribe or twist,
> Thank God! the British journalist.
> But, seeing what the man will do
> Unbribed, there's no occasion to.

But that's Britain. Here, no man but a blockhead ever wrote except for money.

Meanwhile, back at the press conference, Bush went on to the next question, pointing to a man who was sitting some rows back, and who was wearing a laminated credential identifying him as Jeff Gannon, a reporter for a news service called Talon News. "Thank you," the man said, and popped this poser:

> Senate Democratic leaders have painted a very bleak picture of the U.S. economy. Harry Reid [the Senate Democratic leader] was talking about soup lines, and Hillary Clinton was talking about the economy being on the verge of collapse. Yet, in the same breath, they say that Social Security is rock-solid and there's no crisis there. How are you going to work—you said you're going to reach out to these people—how are you going to work with people who seem to have divorced themselves from reality?

Softball is often the name of the game at White House press conferences, and it is not uncommon for a correspondent to serve up an intentional walk. But rarely is

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

the pitcher so unskillful that the base on balls turns into a beanball.

The unusually blatant sycophancy of the question naturally drew attention to the questioner, and in the weeks since a curious story has emerged. Jeff Gannon, the reporter for the news service called Talon News, turns out to be "Jeff Gannon," a "reporter" for a "news service" called "Talon News." His real name is James Guckert. He is not a reporter but a propagandist and (even though his "news reports" have often featured appeals to anti-gay bigotry) apparently a part-time male escort, whose registered Internet domains include hotmilitarystud.com. Talon News is not a news service but a front for GOPUSA.com, a Texas Republican Web site. Because of this, the Congressional press galleries, which issue the standard Washington press passes, refused to accredit him. Even so, he was for two years a regular at the daily White House briefings, where Scott McClellan, the press secretary, frequently called upon him when the going got tough. ("Go ahead, Jeff" was McClellan's standard cry for help, as the invaluable Web site MediaMatters has documented.) The premises of "Jeff's" question to the President were false, gleaned from the alternative universe of right-wing talk radio. Or so Rush Limbaugh said on his program that afternoon. After reading "Jeff's" question aloud, Limbaugh crowed:

> We made this point yesterday. I mean, Hillary is out there talking about the economy is on the verge of collapse, and Harry Reid's describing America with nobody's got health insurance, forty-five million without health insurance, wages are going down. It's horrible out there! Harry Reid never said soup lines. That's my term for the simple way to characterize the Democrats' view of America. . . . But the reporter attributed it to him, and I'm not angry about this at all, folks! I'm flattered and honored and proud!

One might imagine that all of this had the makings of an old-fashioned, months-long, television-friendly Washington scandal—not as important, obviously, as, say, the Iran-contra affair of the nineteen-eighties, but more so than, say, the flap about the dismissal of several employees of the White House travel office in 1993. One would probably be wrong. The non-Fox cable news outlets began to pick up on it last week; MSNBC even assayed a special logo, "Gannongate." A better name for it, though, would be "Nothinggate," because nothing is what is likely to come of it. What all the memorable scandals of the past thirty years—real and fake alike, from Watergate to the Clinton impeachment—have had in common is that the opposition party controlled at least one house of Congress, which gave it the power to hold hearings and issue subpoenas. If Bush ends up having an easier time of it in his second term than any of his two-term predecessors since F.D.R., it won't be because the scandals aren't there. It'll be because the tools to excavate them are under lock and key.

Last Thursday, Bush had another press conference, to announce the appointment of a director of national intelligence, and he made an elaborate show of familiarity with his interlocutors. A dozen of them got to ask questions, and the President called upon all but one by name. Perhaps he was simply letting the world know that from now on the reporters who are vouchsafed the privilege of asking questions at Presidential press conferences will actually be reporters. But be careful, White House correspondents. He knows who you are.

—*Hendrik Hertzberg*

HERE TODAY DEPT.
GATED

An art critic was testily perambulating "The Gates," in Central Park, with his wife and a friend from Texas on the first Sunday afternoon of its installation when he suddenly got a load of their thousands of fellow-walkers and registered the common mood—a sort of vast, blanketing, almost drowsy contentment. He couldn't think of any other occasion on which he had witnessed so many New Yorkers moving slowly when they didn't have to. Each person looked strangely, nakedly personal: not a New Yorker at all, or anything else in particular. The crowd's many-voiced sound had an indoor intimacy, like the bright murmur in a theatre, during intermission, when the play is good and everybody knows that everybody knows it. The over-all social effect, which was somewhat like that of an electrical blackout or a major blizzard, minus the inconvenience, was weird and terrific. (You could give yourself a nice scare imagining "The Gates" magically removed, and leaving the people looking as they looked—a goofball "Night of the Living Dead.") The voluble disaffection of the art critic, me, collapsed, to the relief of my companions. I had to admit the reason for it, which was that "The Gates" is a populist affront to the authority of art critics, and to accept being just another shuffling, jostling, helplessly chummy citizen.

Of course, "The Gates" is art, because what else would it be? Art used to mean paintings and statues. Now it means practically anything human-made that is unclassifiable otherwise. This loss of a commonsense definition is a big art-critical problem, but not in Central Park, not this week. What the artists Christo and Jeanne-Claude have been doing for three and a half decades is self-evident. They propose a grandiose, entirely pointless alteration of a public place, then advance their plan in the face of a predictable public and bureaucratic resistance, which gradually comes to seem mean-spirited and foolish for want of a reasonable argument against them. They build a constituency of supporters, including collectors who help finance the project by buying Christo's drawings and collages of it. What then occurs is like an annual festival—Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade, a high-school prom—without the parts about its being annual or a festival. It feels vaguely religious. The zealous installers and minders, identifiable on site by their uniforms and chatty pride, are like acolytes. As with any ritual—though "The Gates" can't be a ritual, because it is performed just once—how people behave during the installation is what it is for and about. Then it's gone, before it has a chance to become boring or, for that matter, interesting.

Those who deplore "The Gates" as ugly aren't wrong, just poor sports. The work's charm-free, synthetic orange hue—saffron? no way—is something you would wear only in the woods during deer season, in order to avoid being shot. The nylon fabric is sullen to the touch. The proportions of the arches are graceless, and dogs alone esteem the clunky bases. As for the sometimes heard praise of the work for framing and, in the process, revealing unsuspected lovelinesses of the Park—C'mon, people! You don't need artificial aids to notice things. "The Gates" does trigger beauty when, as on

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Use as directed by your doctor. ©McNeil-PPC, Inc. 2005 the aforementioned Sunday afternoon, a low sun backlights the fluttering fabric, which combusts like stained glass in a molten state. This effect lasts all of about two seconds—the time span suggested in the observation of the art historian Kenneth Clark that we can enjoy a purely aesthetic sensation for only as long as we can keenly savor the smell of a fresh-cut orange. (Yes, he said an orange.) "The Gates" succeeds precisely by being, on the whole, a big nothing. Comprehended at a glance, it lets us get right down to being crazy about ourselves, in a bubble of participatory narcissism that it will be pitiable to have missed.

—*Peter Schjeldahl*

THE PICTURES
ONE BILLION

About the Oscars this Sunday, one thing may safely be predicted: someone will do something embarrassing onstage, and someone else will point out that it was done in front of a billion people. It is common knowledge that the Academy Awards are watched by a billion people around the world. "They keep reminding you, like, every two seconds," Cate Blanchett, who is a nominee for Best Supporting Actress, recently complained to Oprah Winfrey. Last year, the figure cropped up in the Los Angeles *Times*, the *Daily News*, *The Economist*, and dozens of other publications. If anyone remembers a single speech from last year's Oscars, it is probably the one made by Andrew Stanton, the co-director of "Finding Nemo," who told his wife, "I wrote it to you in a note in eighth grade, now I can say it in front of one billion people: I love you."

But the worldwide audience for the Oscars isn't even close to a billion, as a little common sense makes plain. In the United States, 43.5 million people watched the show last year. That's a lot, but it's 956.5 million short of a billion. Can the show really pick up that many viewers in countries that most of the films and people being honored are not from, and where the speeches are in a language that most of the population does not speak?

One way to calculate that the Academy Awards could almost reach a billion viewers is to assume that since the domestic audience of 43.5 million amounts to fifteen per cent of the American population, maybe fifteen per cent of the world population also watches. That would make nine hundred and sixty million, close enough for rounding up. There are a few problems with this assumption, though. The first is that even though the ceremony is broadcast in more than a hundred and fifty countries, in many of those it is available only on satellite or cable channels that have relatively few subscribers. If one uses some generous estimates (is it possible for every man, woman, and child in Russia to get to a TV?), the total potential audience for the Oscars is around two billion. Fifteen per cent of two billion is only three hundred million. Few other countries track television audiences the way the United States does, so solid data are hard to come by, but the evidence isn't promising. For instance, of the 715 million Chinese who could have tuned in last year, only one per cent did. Recently, the Colombian actress Catalina Sandino Moreno, a Best Actress nominee for "Maria Full of Grace," told the *Times* that she had never seen the Oscars at all. "In Colombia, the big thing is to watch the beauty pageants," she said.

So where does the billion figure come from? "I think several years ago that was a number that a variety of entities handed out," Leslie Unger, the publicity coördinator for one of those entities, the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, said. "I don't believe any entity now thinks that the number has any veracity." The division of the Walt Disney Company that distributes the show internationally also disavows the figure. Unger added, "Our best estimate is several hundred million."

Despite the backpedalling and the occasional skeptical glance from such publications as the *Wall Street Journal* and *Variety*, there is little chance that the myth of the billion viewers will fade, if only because it has a twenty-year jump on the revised figure. The claim that a billion viewers watch the Oscars first appeared on March 24, 1985, in an Associated Press article, according to Nexis. The following year, it was cited onstage by the Academy's president, and by Robin Williams, who turned it into a joke ("A billion. That's more than Mrs. Marcos spends in, oh, maybe a week").

One of the earliest and most enthusiastic citers of the statistic was a U.P.I. columnist named Vernon Scott. Between 1985 and 2002, when he died, at the age of seventy-nine, Scott mentioned the figure at least thirty-nine times. He pegged the Oscar audience as, variously, "a billion," "an estimated billion," "approaching a billion," "a reported billion," and "more than a billion." A couple of times, it spiked upward, once to "1.5 billion" and once to "2.5 billion," before settling back down.

A billion?

It helps, perhaps, that, while common sense exposes the billion figure as preposterous, Hollywood common sense reinforces it. If you are, say, Cate Blanchett, or even Andrew Stanton, how could it possibly occur to you that a billion people wouldn't want to watch you win an award?

—*Daniel Radosh*

STRIPES DEPT.
NIGHT AT THE OPERA

Ernest Lee, a cadet at West Point who comes from Sacramento and hopes to serve in South Korea's demilitarized zone, has musical tastes that are appropriately youthful, if not particularly martial. "I am kind of into the indie scene right now," Cadet Lee explained the

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other evening, standing in the lobby of the Metropolitan Opera House. Lee, who is tall and upright, and has very short dark hair and a habit of ending his sentences with the words "Sir" or "Ma'am," was, along with nine other cadets, attending a performance of "Turandot." The cadets were all uniformed in dress gray: tapered wool pants or skirt and a high-necked black-trimmed jacket that nipped dashingly in at the waist, and, in their hands, peaked caps, which served as handy receptacles for the evening's program. It was the first time that any of them had been to an opera house, though some of them had attended a production of "La Traviata" that visited West Point last semester. As Andrea Travis, one of five female cadets in the all-volunteer opera squad, explained, "I've been to 'Phantom of the Opera,' but this is a little different."

"Turandot," Puccini's lush last work, in which a cruel Chinese princess is won from her commitment to chastity by witnessing the self-sacrificing power of a servant girl's love, was not selected for the cadets on account of the military lessons delivered by its plot, although the Princess Turandot's penchant for beheading suitors and the tragic servant Liù's ability to withstand torture at the hands of soldiers do have an unfortunate applicability within today's theatres of war. The opera was chosen for the accessibility of its story and the melodiousness of its arias, according to Douglas Cohn, the C.E.O. of Standard Holdings Group, who has initiated a program to help create what he calls "Renaissance officers."

Cadet at the Met

Captain Cohn, West Point Class of '68, volunteered for service in Vietnam, where he spent nine months before being retired on medical grounds. (He took five bullets and lost a thumb in combat.) He dates his own love of opera to a music-appreciation class that he took in high school. "Opera is one of the highest forms of art," he said. "It helps raise the human spirit; it gives meaning to life; it gives continuity to life; it gives purpose and civilization." Officers who are exposed to opera are, Cohn maintained, less likely to permit such occurrences as the looting of the Baghdad Museum. "A well-rounded officer is going to know how to behave himself in combat," he said.

If the connection between opera appreciation and wartime restraint is not without exception—Josef Mengele was said to whistle his favorite arias while sending prisoners to the gas chambers—the West Point team appeared appropriately elevated by their experience during the first intermission, when they were escorted backstage. When Andrea Gruber, who was playing Turandot, and Johan Botha, who plays her would-be lover Calaf, emerged from their dressing rooms, the future officers were rendered more or less speechless. "Hi, West Point kids!" said Gruber, a native New Yorker who, in contrast to her stately, vengeful stage persona, was chatty and informal, and who slouched comfortably in the underdress of her costume, which looked a bit like a celadon nightgown. "You wait until you see what I have to wear in Act II," she said, swigging from a bottle of Gatorade; the cadets, several of whom had spent the morning running six miles while carrying thirty-five-pound backpacks, murmured in sympathy.

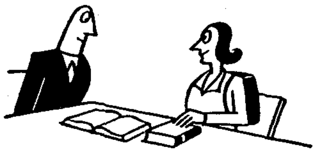
After the second act—during which Gruber wore a headdress that resembled an oversized chandelier—the cadets were served dessert and coffee in the Grand Tier restaurant. "That was the best set I have ever seen," Cadet Travis said. "I was blinded by it at first." Cohn was eager to take every opportunity to improve the cultural savoir-faire of his young charges, and bounded over to one table full of cadets, gesturing upward. "That's a Marc Chagall up there, and there's another one on the other side," he told the group, who respectfully lifted their attention from slices of pumpkin cheesecake and plates of chocolate bombe.

After the third and final act, with its strains of "Nessun dorma," perhaps familiar to the cadets from cell-phone ring tones, and its message that love is capable of swelling the most well trained of hearts, the cadets were at liberty to head out on the town. The evening's emotional exertions, however, coupled with the physical exertions of the previous day, during which they had meticulously cleaned their rooms in anticipation of a major inspection, meant that several were ready to return to their hotel and call it a night. Ernest Lee, descending to the coat check, declared his intention to develop his newfound taste for Puccini at the first opportunity. "I want to get the soundtrack," he said.

—*Rebecca Mead*

POSTSCRIPT

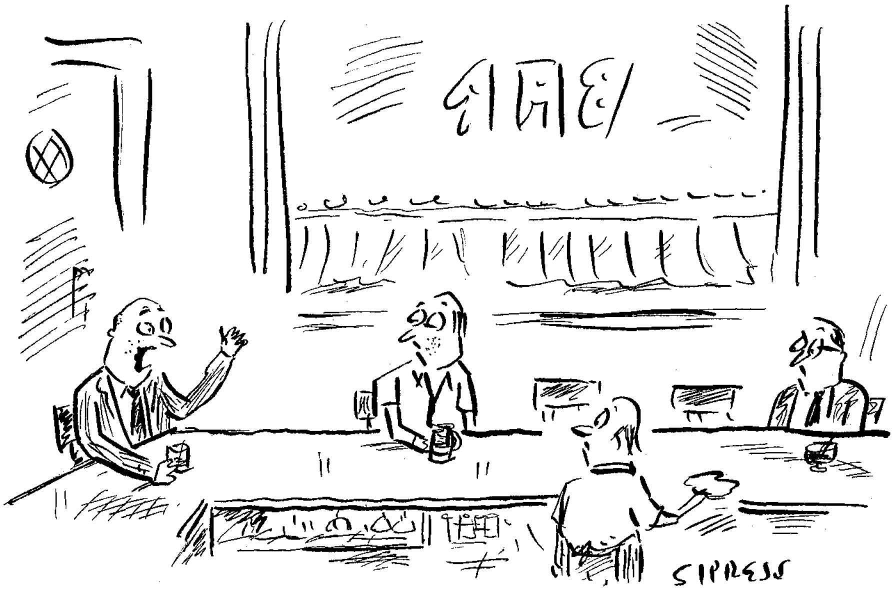
MISS GOULD



Six decades ago, not long after being hired by Harold Ross as a copy editor at *The New Yorker*, a shy young woman, an Oberlin graduate, set to work on a manuscript by James Thurber and soon came across the word "raunchy." She had never heard of the word and thought it was a mistake. "Raunchy" became "paunchy." Thurber's displeasure was such that the young woman barely escaped firing. Later, according to his biographer Harrison Kinney, Thurber wrote that "facetiously" was the only word in English that had all six vowels in order. What about "abstemiously"? the copy editor replied. Thurber, who was not easily impressed, was finally compelled to ask, "Who is Eleanor Gould?"

Miss Gould, as she was known to everyone at the magazine, died last week, at the age of eighty-seven. She worked here for fifty-four years, most of them as its Grammarian (a title invented for her), and she earned the affection and gratitude of generations of writers. She shaped the language of the magazine, always striving for a kind of Euclidean clarity—transparent, precise, muscular. It was an ideal that seemed to have not only syntactical but moral dimensions.

Her devotion to what she called her "reading" was as intense as any writer's to his writing. She never missed a day of work. Fifteen years ago, when she was seventy-two, she discovered, during a conversation with a colleague, that she had gone completely deaf. She came to the office anyway, riding the bus down Central Park West as she always did. Thereafter, writers and other editors wrote notes to her on scraps of paper. She answered in a birdlike voice, high and a little scratchy, like a gull's.



"Why doesn't Ken Burns make a documentary about this?"

• •

Miss Gould occupied various offices over the years, including one that Thurber had decorated by drawing on the walls. Her bookshelf held a row of favorite authorities, including a Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, Fowler's Modern English Usage, and Theodore Bernstein's "Miss Thistlebottom's Hobgoblins," and on a dictionary stand was Webster's Second Unabridged. Wearing thick glasses and an ever-changing array of bright-colored pants and sweaters, she spent the day, and many nights, hovering over her stack of galley and page proofs. Her attention seemed never to waver. She did not daydream. You were unlikely to pass her office and catch her staring off into the canyons of midtown.

A typical "Gould proof" was filled with the lightly pencilled tracery of her objections, suggestions, and abbreviated queries: "emph?" "ind.," "mean this?" She confronted the galley proofs of writers as various as Joseph Mitchell, J. D. Salinger, Janet Flanner—well, everyone, really. She did a proof on every nonfiction piece published in the magazine. Even a writer as determinedly vernacular as Pauline Kael, who initially found Miss Gould's suggestions intrusive, came to accept them—*many* of them, anyway—with gratitude. Her reading was detached, objective, scientific, as if she somehow believed that a kind of perfection in prose was possible. Like Bobby Fischer's sense of the chessboard, her feel for English was at a higher level than the rest of us—we editors and writers—could hope to glimpse.

"My list of pet language peeves," she once told *The Key Reporter*, the Phi Beta Kappa newsletter, "would certainly include writers' use of indirection (i.e., slipping new information into a narrative as if the reader already knew it); confusion between restrictive and nonrestrictive phrases and clauses ('that' goes with restrictive clauses, and, ordinarily, 'which' with nonrestrictive); careless repetition; and singular subjects with plural verbs and vice versa." She was a fiend for problems of sequence and logic. In her presence, modifiers dared not dangle. She could find a solecism in a Stop sign.

Once in a great while, Miss Gould would lose her editorial patience—"No grammar! No sense!" was one exclamation of distress; "Have we completely lost our mind?" she once wrote in the margins of a Talk of the Town galley when the section still used the editorial "we"—but she did not take offense when her suggestions were overruled by another editor or the writer. Miss Gould once found what she believed were four grammatical errors in a three-word sentence. And yet the sentence, by Lawrence Weschler (and, alas, no longer remembered), was published as written.

In some cases, Miss Gould's suggestions took the ideal of clarity to Monty Python-like extremes. For example, some years ago, she saw the phrase ". . . and now sat stone still, chewing gum throughout the proceedings" and suggested replacing the last bit with "sat stone still except for his jaw, which chewed gum." Funny, yes, but the correction planted a red flag. Something was wrong, and needed fixing. Her attentions, imperceptible to the reader, made all the difference. Her effect on a piece of writing could be like that of a master tailor on a suit; what had once seemed slovenly and overwrought was suddenly trig and handsome. The wearer stood taller in his shoes.

Especially in the early years of the magazine, there were many office romances and marriages, and, in 1946, Miss Gould married the head of the fact-checking department, Freddie Packard. The two worked for the magazine for a combined ninety-nine years. (Mr. Packard died in 1974.) They had a daughter, Susan, with whom Miss Gould travelled to remote destinations. In her late seventies, after reading Apsley Cherry-Garrard's "The Worst Journey in the World," Eleanor set off with Susan for the Antarctic.

Miss Gould used to tell her friends at the magazine that she wanted to work until she was a hundred. A stroke, which she suffered at her desk, in 1999, forced her to retire. The title of Grammarian was retired with her. In subsequent years, friends at the magazine would visit or send gifts: books, flowers, a basket of cheeses and fruit. But after a while she found such attentions hard to bear. She missed the work that she could no longer do. To one correspondent she sent a beautiful letter, frank and kind, needlessly grateful, which ended with the sentence "Please forget about me." Of course, we never could and we never will.

—*David Remnick*

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LETTER FROM BASRA

TESTING GROUND

In the Shiite south, Islamists and secularists struggle over Iraq's future.

BY GEORGE PACKER

In the southern Iraqi city of Basra, three days before the country's recent national elections, Youssef al-Emara, a man in his mid-fifties, visited the office of Majid al-Sary, a forty-two-year-old official in the Ministry of Defense. Emara, who had just been appointed to the same ministry, had a difficult political problem that he wanted Sary's help in resolving. He didn't realize that he and the man behind the desk were old acquaintances, with a certain shared history, until Sary reminded him. They then spent several hours talking over the unhappy past.

In 1982, in the second year of the twentieth century's longest conventional war, both men were young officers in the Iraqi Army—Emara was a thirty-three-year-old major, Sary a twenty-year-old lieutenant—who slipped separately across the border and defected to Iraq's enemy, Iran. They were from Basra and, like most people in southern Iraq, they were Shiites. Otherwise, they could not have been more different. Emara, bearded, stocky, and square-headed, with the wary manner of a man who has long been involved in underground politics, is a strict Muslim, who bears a prayer bruise in the middle of his forehead. His intention in defecting was to fight to spread Iran's Islamic revolution to his own country. Sary, for his part, keeps his cleft chin clean-shaven; he is a dapper dresser who laughs and cries easily. As a young man, he liked to drink and chase women. Basra, Iraq's second-largest city, was then a cosmopolitan port with spice shops owned by South Asian merchants and night clubs with Egyptian bartenders and Kuwaiti patrons; it had been a congenial place for him, until the war. Sary fled Iraq to escape the brutality of Saddam Hussein's regime and the pointless war it had launched.

Emara and Sary first met in an Iranian town east of Tehran, where they and other Iraqi defectors decided to form an opposition group. But they couldn't agree whether to call it the Free Officers Movement or, as Emara wanted, the Free Islamic Officers Movement. In the end, Emara's faction prevailed, and Sary was pushed out of the organization, which came under the control of Iran's Revolutionary Guard and was renamed the Badr Brigade, after a famous battle in 624 A.D., when the Prophet and his faithful supporters, though vastly outnumbered, defeated the Meccan Army.

Emara became Badr's artillery commander. The militia expanded with the recruitment of prisoners of war: Iran, which eventually held up to seventy thousand Iraqis, pressured the Shiites whom they captured to join their Persian brothers against the apostate tyrant who was killing their religious leaders in the holy cities of Najaf and Karbala. Remarkably few Iraqi Shiites were willing to place sectarian belief or self-interest ahead of national loyalty, even though those who refused faced years of squalid confinement. Those Iraqis who did reverse their allegiance were led into combat, in the marshes north of Basra, by Emara. The Badr Brigade earned a reputation for ferocity, and Emara felt no compunction about killing fellow-Iraqis.

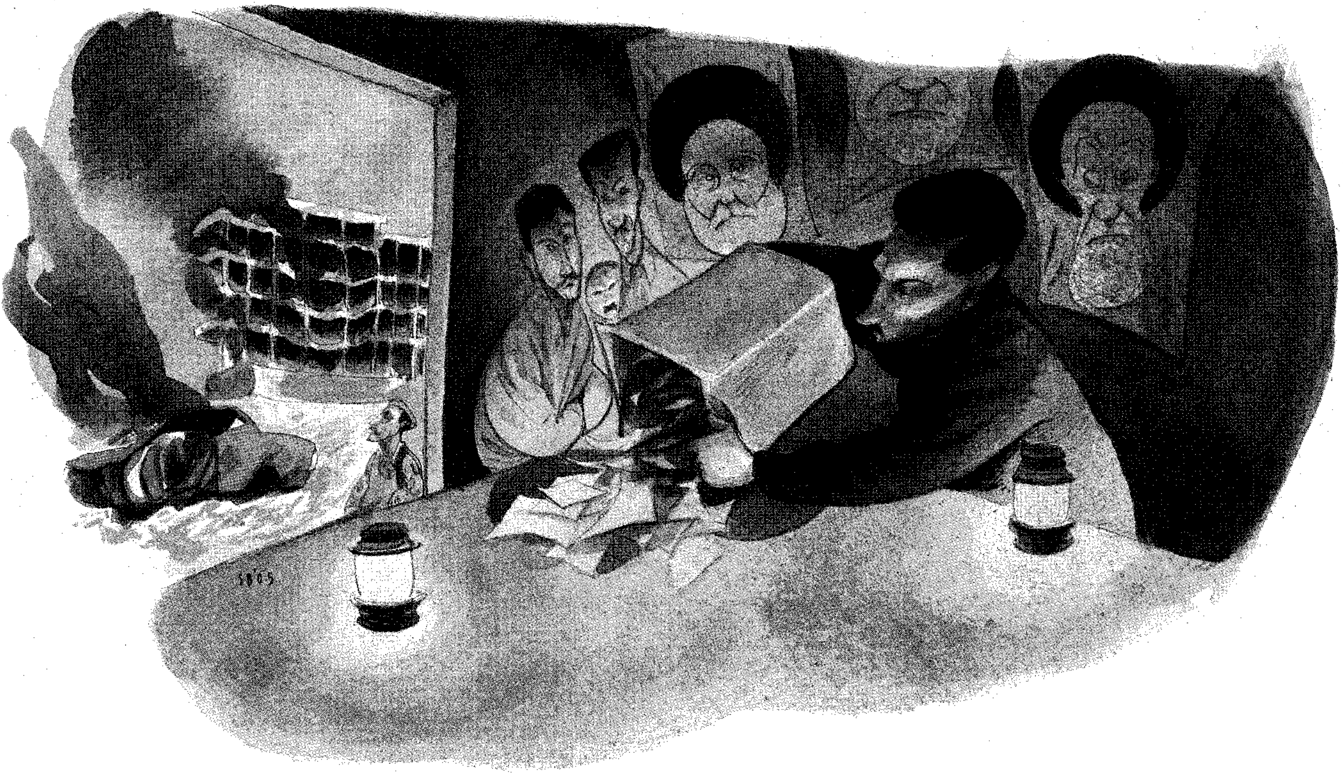
Sary quickly found that he liked revolutionary Iran no better than fascist Iraq, and he moved on to Pakistan. In 1985, the Pakistani intelligence service arrested him and turned him over to Iraq. Sary spent two years in Abu Ghraib prison, outside Baghdad, and in other prisons that he said were even worse. He was in solitary confinement for eighteen months; after being sentenced to death, he watched friends taken away for execution while he awaited the same fate. Instead, in 1987, Saddam, who was losing the war and was short of manpower, issued a general-release order, and Sary found himself once again a soldier in the Iraqi Army. He served out the war in Basra with an air-defense unit. By then Basra was on the front lines; Iranian troops, just seven miles away, constantly shelled the city from across the Shatt al-Arab waterway. Saddam had launched the war to seize the waterway and to prevent Ayatollah Khomeini, Iran's leader, from inspiring Iraq's oppressed Shiite majority to rise up and create the Islamic Republic of Iraq. But when the Iran-Iraq War ended, in 1988, after eight years and more than a million casualties, the border remained exactly where it had been in 1980: in the middle of the waterway. "Nobody won," Emara said. "Ask Saddam what it was for."

The next war came to Basra in 1991, when the American-led coalition expelled Saddam's forces from Kuwait. Sary had been sitting in his house for three years, reading history and poetry; he was afraid to leave, and his record made him unemployable. On the morning of March 2nd, Sary's cousin arrived with the news that, during the night, in al-Hayaniya, the vast slum west of downtown, young men, using weapons they had bought from soldiers of the routed Iraqi Army, had taken over a police station and attacked Baath Party offices. Women were in the streets shouting, "Saddam is falling!" Sary was swept up in the spontaneous uprising. He had nothing to lose and, suddenly, nothing to fear. "It wasn't a decision," he said. "It was like a historical movement for me. I heard that the people started to move against the regime and I moved myself. I attacked the intelligence building." Sary called the Iraqi intifada "ten days of happiness."

On the fourth day of the revolt, which had spread to other cities, two men in black suits appeared before a crowd outside a mosque in the Temimiya district. They had arrived in a Toyota Land Cruiser with license plates from Tehran. Speaking in accents of the Iranian border region, they urged local people to form checkpoints around the city and stop the advance of Republican Guard soldiers that Saddam had sent to quell the rebellion. They also instructed the women of Basra to wear full-length black abayas. Around the same time, an intelligence cell of the Badr Brigade was sent across the border by the Shiite exile opposition in Tehran, the Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), to organize the chaotic uprising in Basra. Pictures of SCIRI's religious leader, Ayatollah Muhammad Bakr al-Hakim, appeared around Basra, along with images of Ayatollah Khomeini.

Seven days after the uprising began, as the Republican Guard approached the city center, Sary was navigating through pitched battles in the streets when he spotted a familiar face: that of Youssef al-Emara, who was on a reconnaissance mission to prepare for two hundred Badr fighters to attack Basra's main square and navy yard. Sary was suspicious of the Badr Brigade and worried that the intifada, which had begun as a popular movement without a sectarian cast—one of its first martyrs, he said, was a Sunni from Ramadi—would be overtaken by religious Shiites under Iranian control. Still, the sight of Emara, after almost a decade, was welcome. "We were in a war," Sary said. "We needed any help." Emara was too far away for Sary to speak with him, but Sary was led to believe that Emara and other Badr members would supply the local fighters with Katyusha rocket launchers. They never materialized.

In fact, a Badr commander ordered Emara to withdraw his men from Basra and return to Tehran. He was told that Iraqi Army helicopters were hitting the city with napalm. "I thought, Why should we go back if only a few of our members were targeted? The situation was favorable," Emara recalled. "When I said that to my leader, I found that he didn't care, he was cold. I've never understood it to this day." Sary, however, saw the hand of Iran in Badr's retreat, and a leading SCIRI



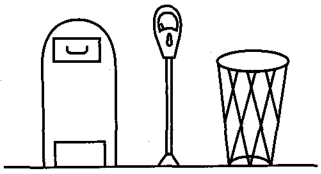
"Most Iraqis don't know what democracy means," a man in Basra said after he voted. "Is it sweet, is it bitter? . . . We don't know."

STEVE BRODNER

official in Baghdad, Adel Abdul-Mahdi, confirmed this, saying that the government in Tehran feared that Saddam was setting a trap for Iran’s proxies.

On the tenth day, Emara and the Badr cell withdrew, and, according to a leader of the intifada, the Iranian Army temporarily blocked Saddam’s Iraqi opponents from crossing the border. A few hundred local Iraqis remained in Basra to resist the Republican Guard, in what amounted to a suicide mission. Men were hanged from the gun barrels of tanks; others were machine-gunned to death, their bodies bulldozed into mass graves. The ceasefire between the United States and Iraq had permitted Saddam to resume using helicopter gunships, and they strafed fleeing civilians. Tens of thousands of Iraqis across the south were slaughtered. Republican Guard tanks were painted with the mocking motto “After today, no more Shiites.”

On March 17th, Sary escaped into Kuwait, and eventually arrived at an American prison camp in Saudi Arabia. From there he went into exile in Sweden, where he wrote a book about the intifada, “Death Coming from the West.” The title referred to western Iraq, the Sunni Arab heartland that was home to the Republican Guard leaders. But there was a larger implication. Like everyone in Basra who told me the story of the intifada, Sary felt betrayed by America as well as by Iran. Two weeks before the uprising, President George H. W. Bush had told Iraqis to overthrow Saddam; flyers dropped by American planes had urged the same thing. In the first days of the revolt, dissident Iraqis thought that the American military was on their side. U.S. soldiers positioned south of Basra had initially provided medical aid and food to people leaving Basra. Moreover, American planes had attacked Iraqi tanks. Yet, according to the dissidents I spoke with, the U.S. suddenly stopped providing support. “Bush told us to uprise,” an Iraqi said at the time. “When we uprose, he went fishing.” A Basrawi who had fled to the Kuwaiti border asked American officers there, “Can you help the people dying?” An officer answered, “We are military—there’s nothing we can do. This is politics.”



Bitterness over the events of 1991 remains strong in Basra. The certificate of membership of a veterans’ group asserts that the bearer “is one of the participants in the intifada, and he participated with all he owns and sacrificed his material goods and his soul to save our city, even to the last moment when the intifada ended, when the evil powers united, the Americans and the Baathists.” This resentment helps to explain the wariness with which the Shiites, more impoverished and disenfranchised than ever, greeted the American invasion in 2003. To many, the defeat of Saddam came twelve years too late.

Emara and Sary both returned to Basra after Saddam’s fall, but, just as they had tried to push the intifada in separate directions, they came back from Tehran and Stockholm with sharply different visions of a new Iraq—one Islamist, one secular. After years of intense suffering, Basra has become a testing ground for the future of Shiite political power in Iraq. And Emara and Sary, the former rebels, have become middle-aged men in pin-striped suits. The Badr Brigade, recently renamed the Badr Organization, now operates freely in Basra—the provisional governor is a member—and Emara is one of its top officials. Last month, he was also appointed to the Defense Ministry, where Sary is an official.

During their meeting before the elections, Emara and Sary sat down in Sary’s office, under a wall plaque commemorating the intifada. Its imagery emphasized the revolt’s national character: a Sumerian sun, an Arab sword, a Kurdish dagger, and symbols of workers and peasants. After they finished reminiscing, Emara got to the point. He wanted Sary to put a stop to the ministry’s accusations of Iranian interference in the elections. The Iraqi Shiite religious parties were likely to come to power after the vote, Emara said, adding that if Sary wanted to keep his position it would be in his interest to coöperate. But Basra’s experience since the fall of Saddam had left Sary deeply suspicious of the Islamist parties. “These are the realities,” Sary said to Emara. “We’re not making it up. Iran is interfering.” And, as an Iraqi patriot, he was unwilling to forge alliances with people who served as proxies for Iran. “We’re looking at the parties from Iran,” he said after ushering Emara out of his office. “The good Iraqis we take. The others we leave.”

The flatness of Basra’s light tells you that the Persian Gulf is only an hour away. The water table in this marshy region is so high that Basra depends on canals for drainage. These days, the canals are blocked, and on one winter day a hard rain submerged whole neighborhoods under several feet of water and sewage; a week later, the flooding ebbed, turning the streets to mud and the city into a picture of soggy neglect. Clay houses that were illegally built jostle for space amid the garbage heaps of the Shiite flats; they provide shelter to families that were driven from the marshes drained by Saddam after 1991. The city center is choked with decaying shops and the ruins of concrete government buildings that were hit by American air strikes during the invasion. Near the Ashar mosque, an Islamic group has taken over an amusement park with a derelict Ferris wheel and a sun-bleached tyrannosaurus. Looted government buildings overlook the banks of the Shatt al-Arab. Downstream, toward the Gulf, is a domed palace complex that Saddam built and allegedly visited only once. It is now occupied by the British and American regional embassies. On a breezy evening in January, I visited the Corniche, the street that runs along the waterway. Egrets flew above rusting smugglers’ trawlers, which floated alongside the wreckage of an Iraqi Navy pilot boat. The moon was rising over the palm trees on the far bank—Iran was hidden a few miles beyond them—and it was almost possible to imagine Basra as the rich center of international trade that it once was.

After the 2003 invasion, more than a hundred thousand Iraqi Shiites who, during Saddam’s regime, had fled to Iran or were expelled returned to southern Iraq. With them came the Islamist political parties that had represented the Shiite opposition in exile: SCIRI and its armed wing, the Badr Organization; Dawa, the oldest Shiite party, whose cadres inside Iraq had been almost exterminated in the nineteen-seventies and eighties; and a host of smaller parties with names like Revenge of God—some of which are armed subsidiaries of Iranian intelligence, people in Basra told me.

The religious parties occupied public

SPOT DRAWINGS BY RICHARD MCGUIRE

"The guy in the cubicle next to yours wants to know if you took one of the rubber ducks that were all in a row on top of his monitor."

buildings in Basra, installed their militias, and organized faster than any of the local groups, except for the mostly impoverished, violent followers of Moqtada al-Sadr, the radical scion of Iraq's leading Shiite clerical family. The religious parties quickly established contact with the British military, the occupying force in Basra. They filled the new police force with their members, and took control of the provincial government. "The Iran-backed parties had a strategic vision, which was more or less to take over the south politically, coöperate with the coalition, enhance their religious position in Najaf, and then be in a position to get national power," a British official told me. "I think they've succeeded without wide support, which is why they've overstretched themselves. Not that many people in the south support the parties."

Since returning from Iran, the religious parties have imposed their strict ideology on Basra, alienating many residents in the process. Upon arrival, armed militias began assassinating Baathists, harassing women who dared to forgo the veil, and forcibly shutting down Basra's DVD emporiums and Christian-owned liquor shops. Zealous university professors demanded that women and men sit apart from each other in classes, and a music-school student told me that he could now study only theory. (Some Islamists consider music immoral.) This coercive social code sat uneasily on the worldly educated classes of Basra, though the city had grown increasingly conservative under the weight of war, sanctions, and the influence of Iran. The provincial government is widely viewed as incompetent and corrupt; oil products are reportedly being smuggled to floating markets in the Gulf. With vast oil reserves, date-palm plantations, and a strategically located port, Basra, long neglected by Baghdad, could conceivably become the engine of an economic boom in Iraq. In the governor's office, I met a representative of a Kuwaiti firm with plans for a sixty-eight-story office tower and a five-and-a-half-billion-dollar investment. For now, violence and bad government stand in the way.

The British military, schooled in counterinsurgency tactics in Northern Ireland, has taken a low-profile approach to the occupation of Basra. Last August, during the uprising of Moqtada al-Sadr's Mahdi army, the British essentially ceded control of the city—one reason that there is much less friction between foreign soldiers and Iraqi civilians in Basra than in areas occupied by American forces. At the same time, some locals grumble that the British are unwilling to impose order in Basra.

The question of Iran's role in Basra's political violence and religious repression is a murky one. To Sary, the answer is simple. "There is no Iranian 'influence' in Basra," he said. "There is an indirect Iranian *occupation* of Basra." The Iraqi religious parties are agents of the occupation, Sary added, though even he drew distinctions between, for example, SCIRI and Dawa, which exert a certain independence from Tehran, and the smaller parties that act as hired guns. Iran, he said, wants to prevent the establishment of a democratic and secular nation next door; it also hopes "to put the American military forces inside the cloud of the Iraqi mess, so they cannot hit Iran by military force." Several people in Basra claimed that the old governor's residence, on the Corniche, is now occupied by Iranian intelligence agents. According to one Western official, suitcases of cash are constantly ferried across what barely functions as an international border. Still, no one seems to know who these Iranians are. Majid Moussa, a farmer, who attended a voter-education meeting at Basra University, told me, "They don't come here as Iranians waving a flag."

The leaders of the religious parties, mindful of the potent force of Iraqi nationalism and the ancient rivalry between Arabs and Persians, deny any foreign connection. "We give the Islamic Republic of Iran, as a government and a people, all our respect, because they gave us so much help and they accommodated a large number of immigrants," Salah al-Battat, SCIRI's stone-faced local representative, told me in his incense-filled meeting room. "But we will not accept for them to put themselves in our internal business, because we do not need anyone else's help. We aren't underage." British officials, meanwhile, take the view that Iran has a legitimate interest in Iraq: the establishment of a stable, friendly neighbor. Simon Collis, the British consul-general in Basra, said of the local religious parties, "These organizations do have links with Iran. Are they Iranian-owned? I don't think so. If you wanted to fight the tyranny in the eighties and nineties, Iran was the address. It's not obvious to me that some mullah in Iran can jerk their chain and make them jump."

In recent months, members of the religious parties have tried to take control of Basra's civic institutions—its schools, hospitals, and security forces. The north campus of Basra University fell under the sway of Sadr's militia, and the south campus went to another religious group, the Fadilah Party. The entrance to al-Sadr Teaching Hospital (formerly Saddam Teaching Hospital) on the Shatt al-Arab was plastered with Shiite religious and political images. In addition to posters of various turbaned Hakims and Sadrs, there were campaign signs promoting the Shiite-dominated United Iraqi Alliance—listed as No. 169 on the national-elections ballot—featuring a lit candle and the wise old face of Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, who oversaw the formation of the Shiite coalition.

Upstairs, I met Dr. Jawad al-Ali, a slight, bespectacled oncologist with unkempt gray hair falling over his eyes. A secular Shiite, he was also wise and old, but he commanded no following and had no security. The party militias, who had the run of the hospital, enforced an Islamic code on medical care (refusing, for example, to permit unveiled women to be treated) and allowed patients and their families to intimidate the hospital staff. Not long ago, a patient under Ali's care died of leukemia. Her husband confronted the doctor, claiming, "My wife died because of you." He demanded money, and when Ali refused, he said, "Doctor, I am so angry with you. I will see what to do."

Ali began wearing a pistol under his clothes, though he knew that he could never shoot anyone. The police were no help, since they, too, had been infiltrated by party militias. The chaos of the hospital was part of the wider insecurity in Basra, where it was hard to distinguish political violence and religious intolerance from ordinary crime. As a last resort, the doctor went to his tribal sheikh and paid for protection—a difficult step for an educated man to take. If anything happened to him, he was told, his tribe would avenge it. Ali mentioned the names of colleagues who had recently been killed: a hospital director, the dean of a college of pharmacy, a surgeon. As the doctor went down the list, his eyes, already magnified by thick lenses, grew wider and his voice softer. "I don't know, really, how we are staying here," he said. "I should leave, but I am so old I can't find a job. My heart is so constricted, like this"—he closed his hand into a fist—"because always I am afraid, even at my house when I return from my clinic."

Across the city, at the Maternity and Children's Hospital in the Jazaar district, Dr. Muhammad Nasir, the hospital's director, was aggressively fighting to keep the religious parties out. He had the tough, jowly face and slicked-back hair of Broderick Crawford as Willie Stark in "All the King's Men." There were no religious pictures in his hospital, only the uplifting get-out-the-vote posters of the election commission and quaint alpine-meadow scenes inside gold frames that had once contained portraits of Saddam Hussein. Last year, a religious militia had demanded the use of a brick wall to cover with political propaganda. "Come back tomorrow morning," Nasir said. That day, he knocked down the wall with a sledgehammer. A few months ago, one of the nurses was caught watching a pornographic DVD with her boyfriend, a receptionist. When Nasir ordered the receptionist transferred to another hospital, the man's friends went to the local Sadr office and reported Nasir for tearing down pictures of Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr, Moqtada's martyred father. The militiamen confronted the doctor and demanded that he rescind the transfer order. "They said I need to be judged by a religious court in Najaf," he recalled with amusement. Nasir armed himself, hired his own hospital security force, and by sheer nerve faced down the intruders.

The hospital was now a model of order. "We need professional people who are expert at their work and they belong to Iraq only, not to any group, and they are brave people, they have brave heart," Nasir said as we walked the clean corridors and toured a new nutrition ward, which had recently been built by Save the Children with money from the U.S. Agency for International Development. He was counting on a democratic election and a strong new government to rescue Iraq from chaos. His brand of secularism was all about law and order: he wanted to practice medicine without religious interference. "We have no in-between solution," he said. "Either we will go ahead with freedom or the whole country will be destroyed. If you speak, I will speak. If you fight, I will fight. Because you have to protect yourself. And if you die you must die with honor. You must not die a coward."

A half mile down the street, outside the modest headquarters of the Fadilah Party (the name means Virtue, or Morals), someone had propped up a wide, vividly painted canvas: an old man with a white beard, standing against a flaming sky, was pushing a boatload of pilgrims across a desert-colored ocean toward the distant gold-domed shrine of Imam Ali, in Najaf. The old man was Moqtada al-Sadr's father. Fadilah's founder, Ayatollah Muhammad al-Yacoubi, claimed that Moqtada's father, before his murder

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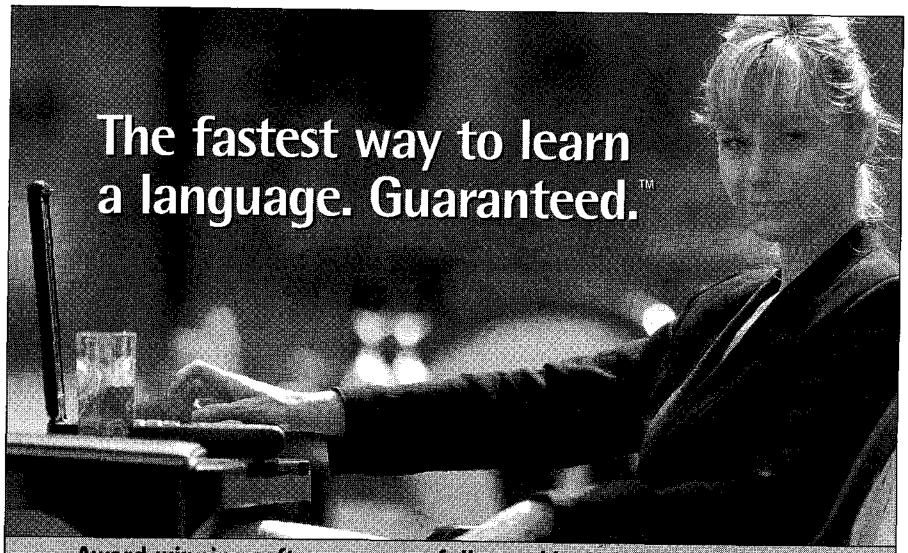
at the hands of Baathist agents, had chosen him as his successor—making Yacoubi, not Moqtada, the genuine heir of hard-line Iraqi Shiism. Among the bewildering array of religious parties in Basra, Fadilah had the largest following among the pious educated classes, who wanted strict Islamic government but also independence from Iran.

Dr. Haider Mohsin, an earnest young internist, sat under a portrait of Ayatollah Yacoubi and explained Fadilah's philosophy while, in the next room, bearded, leather-jacketed male campaign workers came and went in a flurry of preëlection activity. "The Jean-Jacques Rousseau idea, the French Revolution ideas—we think that these ideas are typical ideas for the European society," Mohsin said. "But how far it is from Iraq to the European societies is the distance from Islam to the French Revolution." Cultural imperialism, he said, was the most dangerous kind of imperialism, and Iraq needed to resist the wave of low morals and rampant individualism emanating from the West. "One of the causes that made France fall down in the Second World War was the sexual freedom," Mohsin said. He was quick to add that the Islamization of Iraq should take place by entirely democratic, constitutional means that respected the rights of religious minorities. Mohsin was equally distrustful of Iranian and American designs on Iraq; no country except Iraq, he said, could have the interests of Iraqis at heart. In Mohsin's reasoning, the elections would allow Iraq to find the perfect balance of state and mosque, with the assent of the entire population.

The opposing view was expressed most forcefully by Sary. "All the Islamic laws from the time of the Prophet until our day don't show acceptance of democracy," he said. "Show me any country where there is Islamic leadership that can accept democratic persons. Where could that happen? In Saudi Arabia? In Iran? I don't think so, no. The secular people, the Communists—they accepted democracy. I don't think the Islamic parties will accept anyone who opposes them." Sary compared the prospect of monolithic Shiite rule in Iraq with the tyranny of the Baath Party. For this reason, he said, "religion is something between man and God and should be far away from politics." Sary, who was protected by at least half a dozen National Guardsmen, added,



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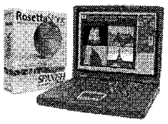

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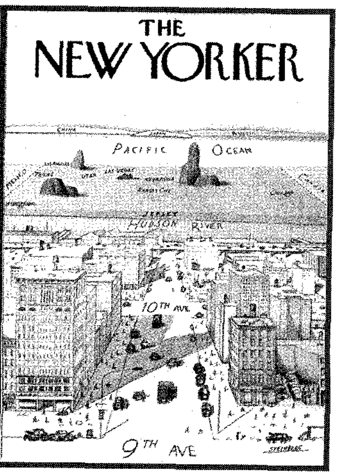


“I’m the only one who can talk like that in Basra, and I know that, at any time, even I can be turned to smoke—because they can blow up my office.”

The Arabic word for “secular” is a neologism, *almaany*, which comes from *aalam*, meaning “world.” It’s not often heard in public these days, for, to many Iraqis, *almaany* also means “godless.” As Hashim al-Jazairy, the dean of the law school at Basra University, said, “This is not a good time for godlessness. God forgives, but the people don’t forgive. I don’t know if I’m going to Hell or Heaven, but there I can say, ‘I’m sorry, God. Please forgive me.’ Here the people don’t forgive.”

In Basra, the confrontation between doctors and militiamen, and between technocratic and religious parties, is not just a matter of guns and posters. In the days before the elections, Basra became the stage for a passionate political struggle between competing discourses and ideas. The notion of a society based on Islamic values and religious authority, which inevitably meant a sectarian Shiite vision, was embodied by List No. 169, which people called the Sistani List. The idea of a society based on civil law, in which Iraqiness would take precedence over ethnic or religious identity, in an effort to heal the country’s deep divisions, was represented by List No. 285, headed by Iyad Allawi, the interim Prime Minister. Allawi himself inspired no great passion; people simply said that he was an educated man, a doctor, which seemed to embody a secular society. Sistani, however, was the most revered man in Iraq, even though he was an Iranian and not a candidate for any office. There were contradictions and illusions on both sides. Allawi supporters spoke of good government, though his administration was accused of being spectacularly corrupt; supporters of List No. 169 spoke of following the *marjayia*, the highest Shiite religious scholars, although Sistani had never formally endorsed the list he was so instrumental in forming. His fatwa said only that Muslim men and women had a religious duty to vote.

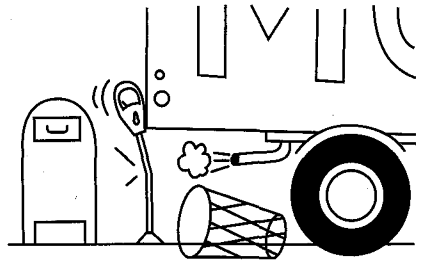
In a sense, Basra was ahead of the rest of the country. Elsewhere in Iraq, the question was whether or not to vote at all. People wondered if they dared defy Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the Jordanian terrorist, who threatened to fill the streets with the blood of the electorate; they debated if an election could even be legitimate, with foreign troops on Iraqi soil. In Basra, whose population is eighty per cent Shiite, and where, in recent days, the violence had reached a comparatively manageable level—that is, two murders of secular political candidates, three or four car bombs, and a handful of attacks on polling stations—the question was whether to vote for Sistani or Allawi.

The religious parties had the best campaign song, chanted to a soundtrack, heavy on percussion and sweeping violins, that was blasted from loudspeakers on convoys of pickup trucks:

All the people should vote for 169
Because it contains those who were in the
 jails,
Those whose fathers and brothers were
 buried in mass graves,
The women who gave their sons,
Those who sacrificed for Iraq.
It’s what the religious scholars want.
169 is like the garden for Iraqis
And Iraqis are the flowers
And these flowers grow because of the
 blood
Of those who gave their lives for Iraq.
God is great!
It’s the day for the Shiites to give their
 voice!

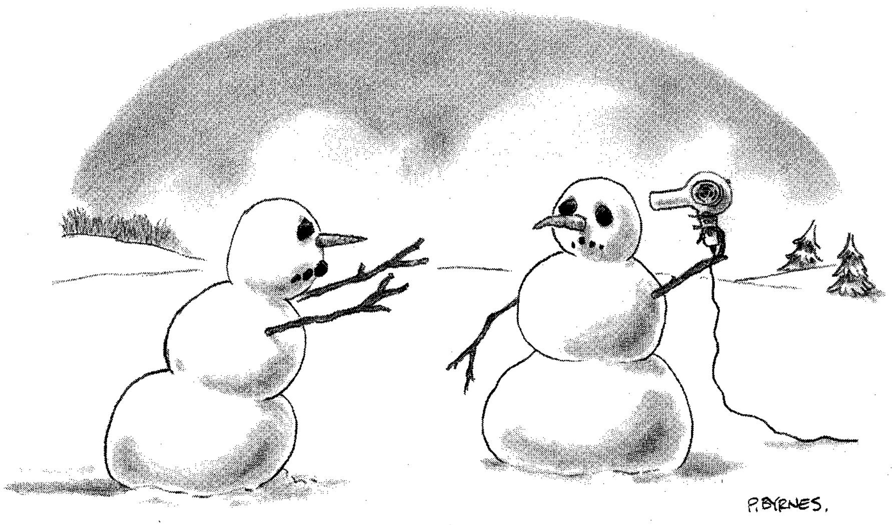
Allawi, in turn, was flooding the Arabic television channels with slick campaign ads, and his government had recently promised raises to civil servants and police officers. His ticket was gaining ground in the minority Sunni and Christian areas of Basra, as well as among professionals. In the days leading up to the elections, a number of Basrawin told me that they sensed a surge toward Allawi.

The day before the elections was a religious holiday called Ghadir al-Khumm. In 632 A.D., as Muhammad made his way back to Medina from his final pilgrimage to Mecca, he is believed to have stopped by a stagnant pool of water, or *ghadir*, in the desert and held up the hand of his cousin and son-in-law, Ali. “For whomever I am his *mawla*,” the Prophet told the world, “Ali is his *mawla*.” Those Muslims who took *mawla* to mean “master,” and believed Ali to be the Prophet’s chosen successor as caliph, became the Shiites. Those who took *mawla* to mean “friend”—and who believed an entirely different account of who succeeded Muhammad—became the Sunnis. So Ghadir al-Khumm marked the beginning of the great fracture among Muslims, and the Arab Shiites were its historical losers. For centuries, they had lived under the religious authority of the Sunni caliphate, and, more recently, they had been dominated by Sunni politicians—even in Iraq, where Shiites were the majority population. Shiites had failed to join the first Iraqi government, under British occupation in the nineteen-twenties, because of a fatwa; and during Saddam’s regime their leaders had been systematically murdered. For secular Iraqis, the country’s first truly democratic elections meant that they could at last escape the nightmare of the Saddam years and join the civilized world. For religious Shiites, the elections would grant them their rightful share of power and correct a historic wrong going back more than a thousand years.



On the Friday before the elections, at the Hakemiya mosque, off a busy commercial street near the bombed intelligence building, Imam Muhammad al-Basry delivered prayers to the men packed into his small shrine. A loudspeaker blared his words to the surrounding neighborhood. He was just thirty-one, a former biologist with square-framed glasses, a missing front tooth, and an ill-at-ease manner. He made sure that his flock understood the significance of the fact that Election Day was the day after Ghadir al-Khumm. Ordinarily, Shiites would travel to Najaf on Ghadir al-Khumm to visit the shrine of Ali; but this year, as part of the election security effort, there would be a nationwide ban on car travel beginning at dusk on the eve of the elections. The Imam said, “There is something we can do that’s maybe more important than this visit. We will make our *rights* clear. And that is much more important than visiting Najaf on the right day.”

The Imam’s voice rose as he tried to galvanize the men kneeling before him. “The day after tomorrow is Election Day,” he said. “It will be a great day, and we should prepare ourselves for this day as we prepare ourselves for any other Islamic feast, because this day will bring victory to the people who suffered from injustice. It will be the day when there will be no more suffering for the people. It will be the day when the victim will get rid of the person who abused him." On Election Day, the Imam declared, Shiites should follow their *marjayia*, their religious scholars, who are the heirs to Ali and his family—the true heirs to the Prophet. The Imam arrived at the point of the sermon: the doctrinal connection between Ghadir al-Khumm and Election Day. "The *marjayia* composed and support a list, the United Iraqi Alliance, which carries the number 169, which carries the candle symbol," he said. "Did anyone not hear me? I want this word to reach even to the outside loudspeakers, so no one will be able anymore to say it is a lie. And I don't want to hear that the *marjayia* didn't support this list."



"Carl! No!"

The Imam was venturing onto controversial ground. The other parties claimed that Sistani, who no one doubted had helped to compose No. 169, had blessed *all* the lists, and they cried foul when his picture started appearing on No. 169 campaign signs. (Sistani had said nothing to resolve the dispute.) The clergy had previously stayed out of the debate. Now Imam Basry wasn't content to clear up the doubt about Sistani's support for No. 169; he went on to imply that the Allawi government, by raising salaries, was trying to bribe voters. "I remind you that death is close to every person," the Imam said. "No one knows when he will die—he might die at any moment. What will he say to our God? 'I voted for a certain list because they gave me money'? How can he face God with this answer?"

The Imam then told his flock what time the polls would open and close, how many pieces of I.D. to bring, how to find the list on the ballot, and how to check the right square. Apparently satisfied that his instructions were clear, he offered his valediction: "God will be with you that day, so you should not fear anything, you should have no fear of terrorists. The Shiites of Hussein should remember this saying: We refuse humiliation, and we should go to vote."

Sunday morning was strange and beautiful. The streets of Basra were so quiet that people later said it was like a feast day. Families, including small children and grandparents, walked along the wide avenues, everyone dressed in fine clothes. Policemen and National Guardsmen stood at intersections every couple of hundred yards, and snipers perched on the roof of the provincial government building. People on their way to vote were amazed to see men in uniform actually doing their jobs. By seven-thirty, at the schools that had been designated polling places, voters were already lining up; the queues were orderly and the faces a little solemn. People submitted without complaint to the frisks, and they seemed to keep their voices low out of respect. Election workers wore badges on their shirts: they were schoolteachers, housewives, unemployed college graduates. They handed out ballots with the slightly exaggerated seriousness of people performing a small but important ritual, like professors distributing final exams. They guided voters' right index fingers into a little glass half full of violet ink. Ordinary Iraqis on any other day, the election workers were thanked as if they were the heroes of 1991. The ballots themselves—beige for the national elections, blue for the provincial—were large and crowded with a bewildering array of party symbols. They looked cleaner and newer than anything I'd ever seen in Iraq.

At the Republican School, just off Independence Street, Shadha Muhammad Ali, a fifty-year-old housewife in a stylish red-and-black scarf, cast the first vote. "I spent thirty-five years of my life going from war to war," she said. "Now my hopes are for my children. We lost our future. We're looking for the future of our children." Mehsin Richem Hashem, a teacher of Arabic at the school and the manager of the polling station, said, "I've lived over fifty years, and I've never had such a feeling. My skin had a strange feeling, like goosebumps. We've had a great culture for six thousand years, and now I think our humanity is proved. We hope this democratic experiment brings this result, that the people are the real owners of the decisions in this country." He wore a slightly tattered jacket and a floral tie, and his face was taut, with a carefully clipped mustache. "There's a rumor they poisoned the water supply in as-Zubair this morning," he said, referring to a Sunni suburb south of Basra. (The rumor proved false.) "We don't care what the terrorists do. They have tried everything, but they can't do anything. Poisoning the water shows they're desperate."

Around eight-twenty, the school shook slightly when a mortar round landed a few hundred yards away. "*Yalla*," someone muttered. "No problem, no problem," Laith Mahmood Shakar, a thirty-two-year-old traffic policeman who had brought his children, said. "What we are doing now is a big thing against terrorism. It's like a challenge to them: We're voting—what can you do?"

A number of voters recalled the only elections they had known, the farces that had certified Saddam's popularity. They had been offered a choice between one box marked yes and one marked no; sometimes, the election workers cast their votes for them. This time, many people exercised their newfound right to keep their choices to themselves. Feisal Jassim, a retired oil-company employee—he had been among the worshippers who listened to Imam Basry's instructions—wouldn't reveal his choice. For him, the experience of voting freely for the first time, at age seventy, was what mattered. "Most Iraqis don't know what democracy means," he said. "Is it sweet, is it bitter? Does it have a taste or a smell? We don't know. After the elections, we'll find out."

In one polling place, I met Abdul-Khadem Hussein Abood, a uniformed National Guard colonel with a fragile physique, a hollow face, and piercing black eyes. Now fifty-six years old, he had been a prisoner of war in Iran for seventeen years, during the prime of his life; he was released and came back to Basra two days before the start of the war in 2003, and was overjoyed to find that his small children had grown up to become engineers and a doctor. Colonel Abood held up four fingers, one for each child: his index finger was stained.

The arrival of the Americans and the British in 2003 freed Iraqis from Saddam, but not from their own suspicions and grievances. It had been a victory of foreigners, which explained why Iraqis had reacted to the occupying forces with prickliness instead of mere gratitude. Liberation was, in a way, humiliating, and the almost two years that followed brought new calamities. On Election Day, the foreign troops were nowhere to be seen, and when Iraqis went to vote the achievement was finally their own.

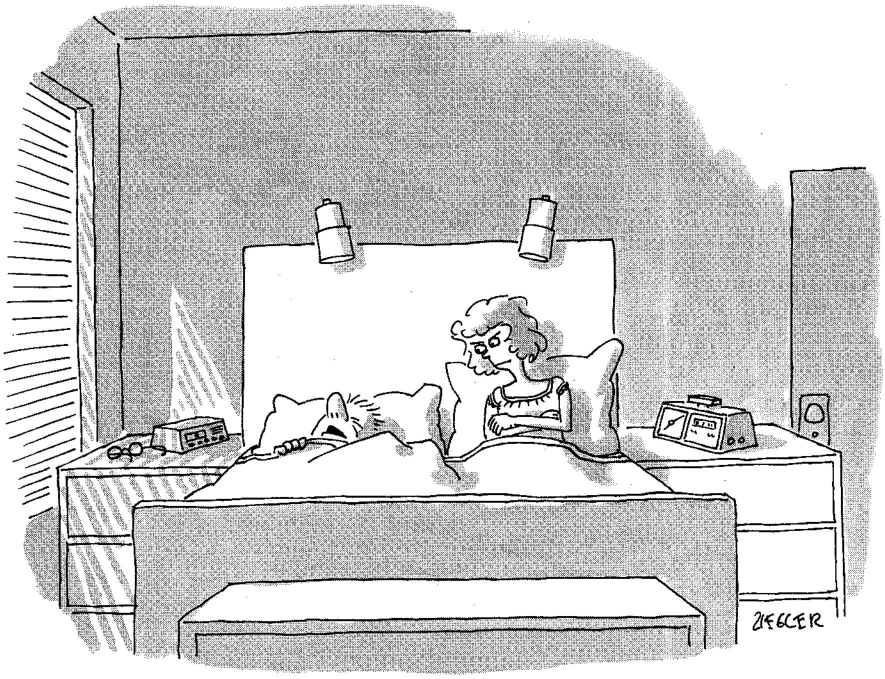
I returned to the Republican School just before the polls closed, at dusk. The last person in line was Abid Hamid, a policeman who had been so busy all day that he'd almost forgotten to vote. "It's not important whom I choose," he said. "I just want to participate." The outer gate was locked, and I was allowed to stay and watch the count. The ballots were collected in bundles of twenty-five, and then laid out, one after another, on a wooden table in the middle of a sixth-grade math classroom. The right hand of the counter, a math teacher named Salih Younis Mahdi, was deformed; he had only the three middle fingers, and they were webbed together. He ran his hand rapidly down the ballots like a ruler, slapping the paper when he came to the checked box, then calling out the number. Ahmed Salih Mahdi, an elderly first-grade teacher, stood silently at the blackboard and recorded the votes in groups of five. Monitors from the parties and the election commission stood by, and when, predictably, the power failed, hurricane lamps were produced, and the classroom became a chiaroscuro study of long shadows and illuminated faces.

The final count at the Republican School was seven hundred and twenty-one for the Allawi list, five hundred and ninety-five for the Sistani list, and a handful of votes scattered among the others. The total number of ballots distributed was two greater than the number of votes counted, and so the men stood around the table in the middle of the room for half an hour more, their faces lit from below, going over the tallies again and again, until they realized that two ballots had been left blank. Everything had come out right.

Two days after the elections, I went back to see Majid al-Sary and found him elated. After all the looting and violence that followed Saddam's fall, he had been too ashamed of his country to bring his family to Basra, and he had been thinking of returning to Sweden if the election results meant the loss of his job in the Defense Ministry. But Election Day had shown him, he said, that "it is worth defending Iraq from terrorists." He went on, "I will stay and fight and stand forcefully for the Iraqi people, and if I die for them I'll be proud."

After a few days, the euphoria from the elections began to wear off, along with the ink on index fingers. Nationwide, the Sistani list won nearly half the vote, and in Basra it took seventy per cent. The Allawi list won less than fifteen per cent nationally and twenty per cent in Basra. In the provincial election, the local Shiite coalition won a third of the vote, with the Fadilah Party a strong second and the Allawi list a distant third. The success of the religious parties left the supporters of Allawi and the local secular candidates stunned, and some of them attributed the result to the misuse of Sistani's name and face. Some Iraqis said that Muhammad Rida, Sistani's son and spokesman, had panicked on the eve of the elections and ordered the Imams to hand down an official endorsement of No. 169. (Sistani's office denies this.) It was the Ghadir al-Khumm Surprise. In this first chance to "give their voice," most Shiites had obeyed their religious leaders. When Iraqis vote again later this year, to elect a permanent government, Sary said, they will hold the religious parties accountable.

In Basra, at least, there had been a contest. Iraq as a whole emerged from

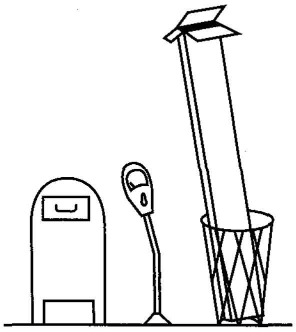


"It would be helpful if the first words out of your mouth every morning weren't 'J'accuse.' "

its first democratic election profoundly split between those who had voted—high numbers among the Shiites and the Kurds—and those who had not. Most of the largely Sunni parties had withdrawn or boycotted, out of principled opposition to the occupation, the prospect of doing badly, or the fear of being killed. And the vast majority of their followers had stayed home, though there were many anecdotes of individuals summoning the courage, toward the end of the day, to venture out into deserted streets to vote, under the hostile eyes of neighbors. The Sunni turnout was estimated to be fifteen per cent; in the vast desert province of Anbar, west of Baghdad, where the dominant tribes had declared a boycott, it was two per cent. The party of interim President Ghazi al-Yawar, a tribal sheikh from Mosul, won only five seats in the new National Assembly, which has two hundred and seventy-five seats. Adnan Pachachi, a former foreign minister and an elder statesman of Arab politics, could not even win a seat for himself.

I visited Pachachi in Baghdad to find out how Iraq could move forward from such a divisive event, in which the country's historical losers had become winners and its winners losers. The transformation would be felt beyond Iraq: the country's Arab neighbors were already alarmed by the spectre of Iranian and Shiite influence rising in the Middle East. Before the elections, in Amman, Ghassan Salame, a Lebanese politician who served in 2003 as the senior political adviser to the United Nations in Baghdad, told me, "Sunnis don't see themselves as one among many factions. They see *themselves* as power. They consider themselves the inheritors of the Ottoman Empire. This is not going to change." When I repeated this to Pachachi, he replied, "I hope there will never be Sunni politics. I don't think there should be Shiite politics, either. We don't want to be like Lebanon. I think this is a temporary thing, this ascendancy of Shiism. Eventually, the majority of the Shiites will turn away from the religious parties. It's an aberration." He went on, "You will see. I think probably sooner rather than later Iraqis will go back to their secular roots."

Pachachi had been meeting with Sunni politicians and religious leaders to determine what it would take to bring them and their constituents back into the political game. "They said they were eager to rectify this mistake" of sitting out the elections, he said, chuckling—"without admitting it, of course." Pachachi was acting as a broker between the marginalized groups and the new centers of power, trying to find a formula by which Sunni leaders could join in the writing of a new Iraqi constitution despite their lack of representation in the assembly. This would both act as a brake on Shiite sectarianism and provide a way for Sunnis who were weary of fighting to rejoin Iraq's political life.



Iraqis of Pachachi's generation and the one that followed remember fondly a country in which no one knew who was Sunni and who was Shiite. The new wave of identity politics is often blamed on outsiders—variously, Iranians, Arabs, or Americans. Every Iraqi can name a sibling or a cousin in a mixed marriage. Of course, the Baath Party, whose leadership under Saddam became almost exclusively Sunni, did not share this egalitarian spirit. Adel Abdul-Mahdi, SCIRI's second-in-command and the current Finance Minister, described the Shiite sense of grievance as a long-simmering civil-rights issue. "We were so much frustrated, insulted, as Shiites," he said. "As you see with the blacks in the States, you cannot judge on big acts—it's the small, the daily behavior of others toward you. For example, your name. Whenever I say 'Adel Abdul-Mahdi,' there will be another who will say 'No, you are Adel Abdul-Hadi,' because Abdul-Mahdi is a Shiite name. It's not only that you are deprived of power, of authority, of functions, posts. It's the daily use of things. Those daily small facts really invade you and make you more conscious. And certain people in the outside world do not understand all this. It's huge. That's why, when you see No. 169 and the people voting for identity, it's not a sectarian question. It's a question of decades of struggle."

The gathering Shiite wave that crested on Election Day has produced a Sunni counter-reaction. It might take the form of a casual joke—such as the text message that was received by an aide to a Sunni Cabinet minister, who had just finished telling me that all Iraqis were the same. "If you like pleasure marriage, vote for 169," said the message, referring to the Shiite practice of religiously sanctioned liaisons. At the other extreme is the frequent, targeted murder of Shiite National Guardsmen, clerics, and ordinary citizens. The vote magnified the sectarian split, making it clear that the insurgency is based at least as much on loss of group power as on resistance to occupation.

Another effect of the elections has been to move the Americans farther from the center of Iraq's political life. The contest is more and more among Iraqis themselves. A Western diplomat in Baghdad, who had met with a hard-line Sunni cleric before the elections, told me, "He did not distinguish between the Americans and the Shiites. He said, 'You are giving the country to the Shiites and the Iranians. It's not a fair game.'" It is no longer possible for Americans to convince such rejectionists to accept their diminished status in Iraq, the diplomat said. "But I think Iraqis could, if you have the right people at the top of the power structure here."

Whether the terrible violence in Iraq will grow even worse depends, in part, on the character of the country's first democratic government. Its new leaders are already suggesting that Islam, in a rigid or sectarian cast, will not dominate Iraqi politics. This will provoke a conflict within Shiism, for Iraq has extremists of every kind, and it will not be smooth or easy, but at least it will be something other than a death struggle among Iraq's Sunnis, Shiites, and Kurds. Basra, where politics has begun to move fitfully toward a state that might someday be called normal, offers one model for a way out of the logic of civil war. "I will fight the terrorism of thoughts," Majid al-Sary said, bringing his fist down on his desk. He was awaiting Youssef al-Emara, whose party had won the elections; they had made an appointment to continue their discussion that afternoon. "The elections showed the strength of religious ideas here. I will stay and fight those bad ideas. It's changing from a fight against violence and explosions to a new category—thoughts." ♦

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SHOUTS & MURMURS

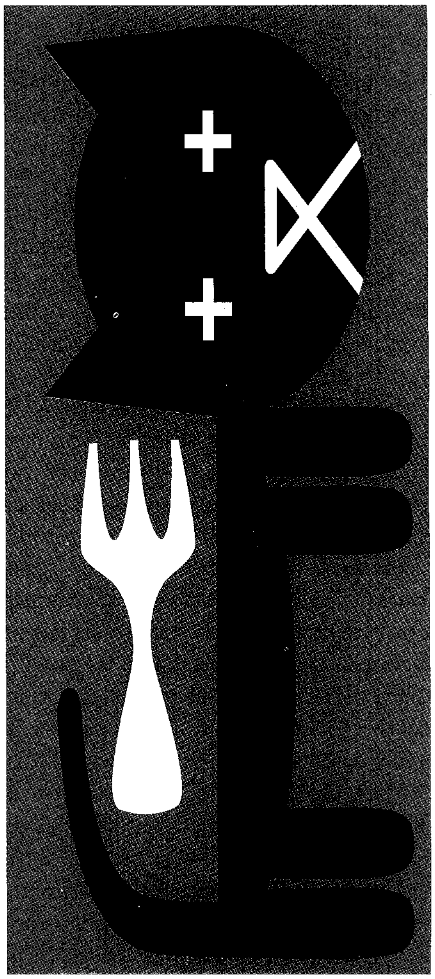
HERE TO TELL YOU

BY IAN FRAZIER

> There were times that Dad's pranks bordered on cruelty. One of his oil-company workers, a one-legged man he nicknamed "Crip" Smith, complained about everything. Dad and Crip's co-workers got tired of the old man's bellyaching and decided to take revenge. One morning Crip called in sick and Dad volunteered to send by lunch to his grateful but suspicious employee. Dad and his chums caught Crip's old black tomcat, killed it, skinned it, and cooked it in the kitchen of one of Dad's little restaurants. They called it squirrel meat and delivered it to Crip on a linen-covered tray. When Crip returned to work the next morning, Dad and his co-conspirators asked him how he liked his meal. They knew he would complain even about a free home-cooked lunch, and when Crip called it "the toughest squirrel meat" he had ever eaten, they were glad to tell him why.
>
> —The Reverend Jerry Falwell, in *"Strength for the Journey: An Autobiography."*

There were times that Dad's pranks bordered on what your out-of-control activist judges might call felonies. One of his employees was an effeminate fellow he nicknamed "Sissybritches" Jones, who had a live-in male homosexual companion for the purposes of sodomy. Ol' Sissy mentioned one day that since he and this guy he did sodomy with had been together for years, they had decided to go ahead and get married. Well, that did it, and so Dad and his friends decided to take revenge. This sodomite couple had an old black golden retriever, and because it was old it didn't matter if it died. Dad and the other dads killed it, doused it with kerosene, set it on fire, hung it up in automobile headlights for a while, and then served it as dog meat on linen-covered trays in their little restaurants. When Sissy and the other one came around afterward and complained, Dad and his squad were happy to let them in on the joke. Then they shot and killed them both.

Of course, I'm exaggerating a little bit here. Every good story gets exaggerated some in the retelling, and there's nothing wrong with that. I seem to recall that the two men were not actually shot and killed, or not at that time. But I think the underlying point of the story remains the same, and it is this: First, we sometimes forget how much humor there is in the Bible. The Bible is full of wonderful, earthy humor, if not on every page, at least on many pages, particularly in the Letters of Paul. And, second, we should never lose sight of the fact that Jesus said—get out your Bibles, it's Matthew 10, verse 34—he said, "I have come not to bring peace, but a sword."



LAURIE ROSENWALD

Note that Jesus does not say he came to bring a dagger, or a wooden club with pointed spikes in it. He specifies a sword. Why does he do that? Probably because the sword was the most advanced weapon of Jesus' day. And if we transpose this saying into our own era, if we wanted a weapon, none of us would be likely to reach for a sword. The verse could perhaps be better understood in our terms if it referred not to a sword but to an automatic rifle or shotgun sold out of the trunk of a person's car in a lumber-company parking lot in Dothan, Alabama. When we see it like that we have a better idea of what Jesus was trying to say.

Now, some of the so-called cultural élites in Hollywood and Washington and Raleigh-Durham want to tell us that our long-standing traditions have become somehow unfashionable in the modern world. And don't kid yourselves—when they say that, they're really telling us they're right and we're wrong. They'll say, for example, that you can't blow up a bag of kittens with a shotgun, just because they themselves never did it for a harmless prank when they were young. Then these folks want to turn around and put their values, or lack of values, on everybody else.

Once again, the answer I have for them is simple: Go back to your Bible. In the very first book, first chapter, twenty-sixth verse—read along with me—it says God gave man, quote, "dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over all living things on the earth," unquote. What does this mean? If you said that it means you can bury an old black Chihuahua up to its neck in your yard and run over its head with a lawnmower, then you have been paying attention, because you are exactly correct. The key is that little word "dominion." When God uses that word he is saying, in essence, man can do to the beasts of the earth whatever he wants or feels like at any particular time.

This is especially true, by the way, regarding cats. I happen not to be fond of cats, and that includes secular-humanist catlike dogs such as Chihuahuas and golden retrievers. This is just a personal preference that I and most of my fellow-pastors share. But when I or any other pastor am asked to perform a marriage of homosexual cats, or of homosexual cat-owning people—well, then I think the hour has come for a scourging of wickedness such as God used to do in the Biblical lands. I know you all are familiar with the story of the old black tomcat and the one-legged newlywed lesbian couple from Massachusetts. If you'd be interested to study it further, there's a copy of it on the pink sheet in your bulletin insert. After you read it you will see several phone numbers at the bottom that you can call.

But that's not what I'm here to talk to you about today. No, it isn't. I am here to tell you that I have never in my life been happier than I am right now. This evening, I actually shed tears of joy at the recent success of our efforts. And as I wept I also danced a little bit, not lewdly like on MTV, but with a couple crossover steps and a godly kind of hop, I felt so blessed. What miracles have been achieved!

Then I strutted for a while, and gave myself high fives in the full-length mirror in my office in the rectory. My son heard me and he came in, and we did some complicated handshakes that I could share with you all if you would like to learn them. Oh, last November was glorious for those who care, as we do, about the traditional, non-homosexual, one-man-and-one-woman-with-children-whose-paternity-can-be-verified family! (And by that I mean, of course, a family in which *both* the man *and* the woman were *born* a man and a woman, and can prove it—that is, they are still exactly the same sex as they were when they were born, and haven't had any of those operations that are all the rage, I'm told.)

By now, it may be obvious to many of you that I'm on the verge of hysteria. I split the back of my jacket in my gyrations before I came out here—those of you behind me would be able to see it if I weren't wearing this beautiful robe. Friends, remember our constitutional Federal Marriage Amendment! We have got to make Congress pass that thing! I believe in my soul that we will. And, before we do, we better remember to put in a couple of sentences about the requirement that you be born a man or a woman, et cetera. I honestly thought of that only just now.

Oh, I feel an unusual presence of administering angels. Truly the spirit has descended upon us tonight. I want you all to bow your heads, and take out your Palm Pilots and BlackBerries and cell phones and laptops, and then work and work them with all your strength, until the kingdom of us begins to appear. ♦

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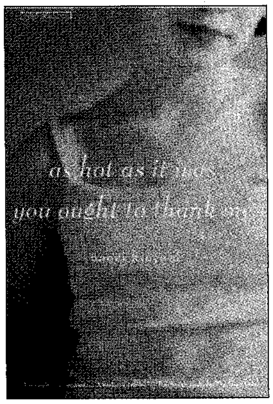
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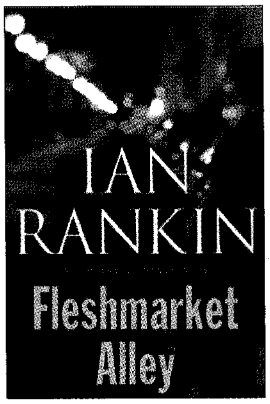
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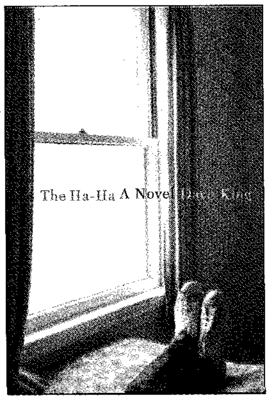
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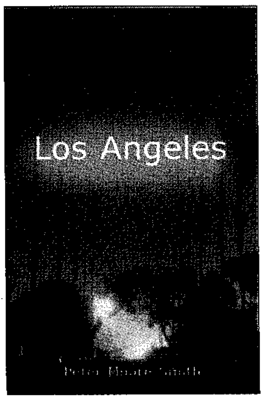
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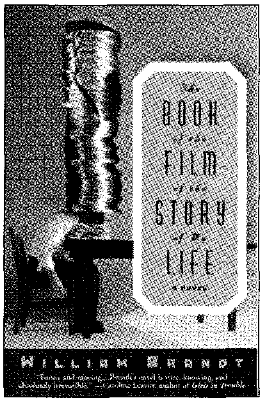
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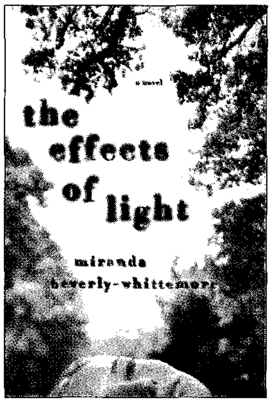
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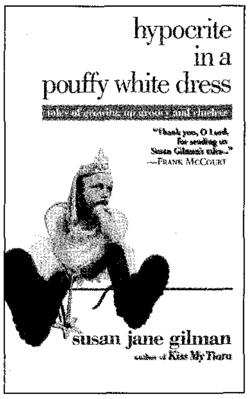
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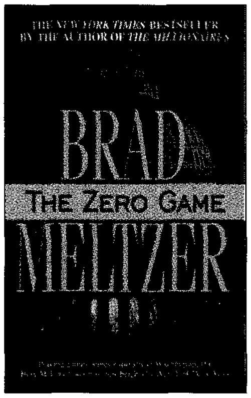
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NATURE'S BIOTERRORIST

Is there any way to prevent a deadly avian-flu pandemic?

BY MICHAEL SPECTER

Early last September, an eleven-year-old girl from Kamphaeng Phet, a remote village in Thailand, developed a high fever, a severe cough, and a sore throat. She lived with her aunt and uncle in a one-room wooden house—not much more than a hut on stilts. The family had fifteen chickens, which wandered freely beneath the plank floor, where the young girl often played and slept. Then, at the end of August, the chickens died. Within days, the girl was sick, too. Her aunt took her to the hospital, but the fever kept rising. The girl's mother, who lived near Bangkok, where she worked at a factory, rushed to her bedside; sixteen hours later, her daughter was dead. In keeping with Thai custom, she was cremated immediately.

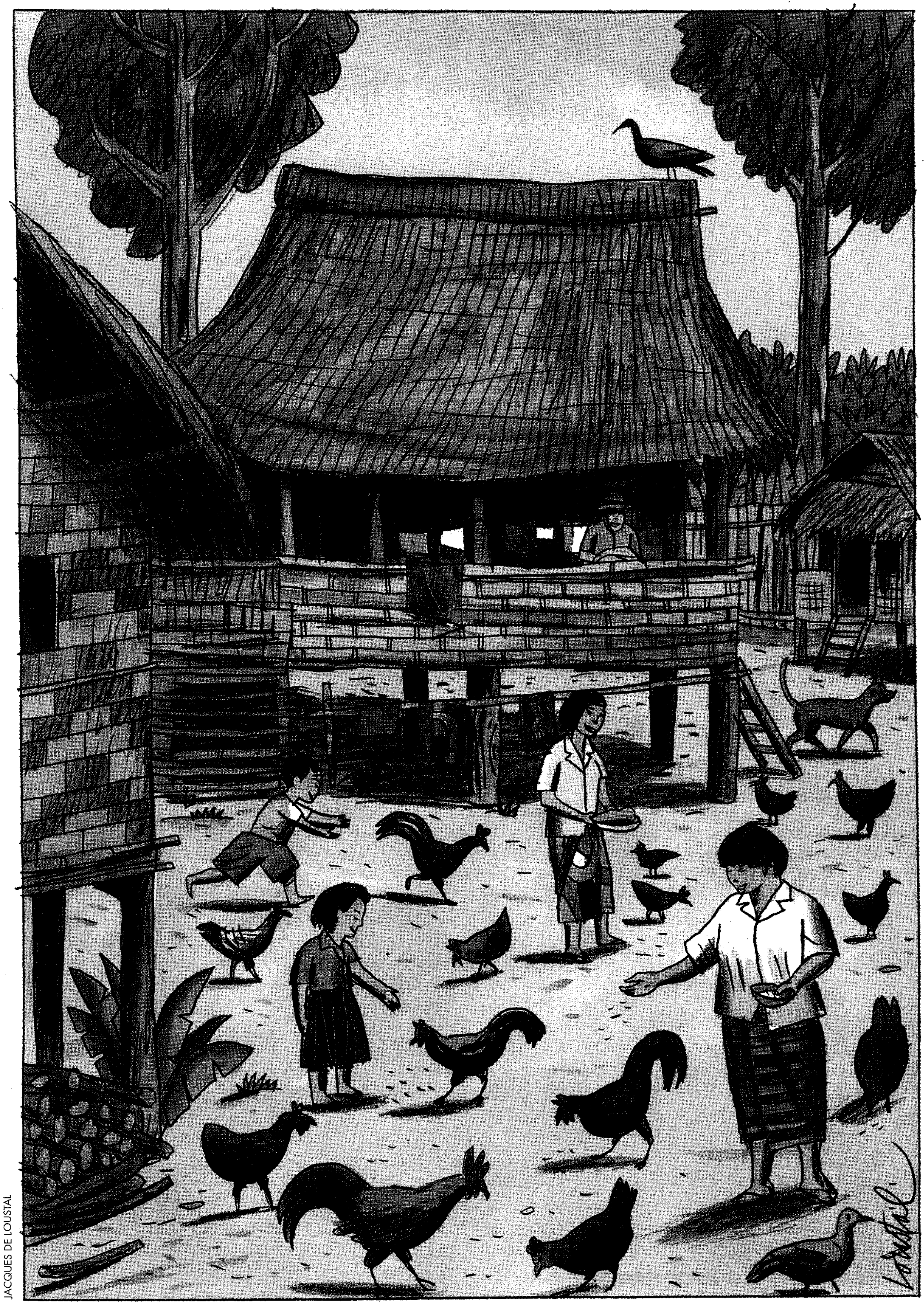
Avian influenza is nothing new in Thailand, or anywhere else where poultry are raised. Veterinarians often refer to it as the fowl plague, because in one form or another the disease has killed millions of chickens, turkeys, and other birds over the years. In 1983, the virus raced so rapidly through the Pennsylvania poultry population that health officials there were forced to slaughter nearly every chicken in the state. Until recently, however, humans rarely became infected with this type of virus. It had happened fewer than a dozen times since 1959, and in each case the illness was mild. But the strain that killed the girl from Kamphaeng Phet is different; in the past two years, it has caused the deaths of hundreds of millions of animals in nearly a dozen Asian countries. No such virus has ever spread so quickly over such a wide geographical area. Most viruses stick to a single species. This one has already affected a more diverse group than any other type of flu, and it has killed many animals previously thought to be resistant: blue pheasants, black swans, turtledoves, clouded leopards, mice, pigs, domestic cats, and tigers. Early in February, nearly five hundred open-billed storks were found dead in Thailand's largest freshwater swamp, the Boraphet Reservoir. And the disease is no longer limited to Asia. In October, customs officers at the Brussels airport seized two infected eagles that had been smuggled from Thailand and destroyed them, along with the other animals held in quarantine at the airport.

This virus also kills people—so far, forty-two have died, including thirteen Vietnamese since Christmas. Those deaths represent more than three-quarters of all known avian-flu infections—an ominous mortality rate. Strains of influenza are named for two proteins on their surface that latch onto respiratory cells and permit the virus to invade them, and, if this strain, known as H5N1, becomes capable of spreading efficiently among humans, it will kill millions. Public-health officials in Asia, still reeling from the crisis created in 2003 by SARS (severe acute respiratory syndrome), have struggled to contain the burgeoning epidemic. Yet the task is immense. SARS was caused by a virus that turned out to be less deadly, less contagious, and far less aggressive than the flu. The threat was never as great. There are six billion chickens in Southeast Asia, and millions of households depend upon them, for income as well as for food; preventing this flu virus from spreading has become all but impossible. By early February, during Tet, Vietnam's biggest holiday, officials began posting livestock inspectors on major highways. Last week, officials banned poultry-raising in Ho Chi Minh City.

Vigilance is one of the few weapons available. Two weeks after the girl died in Kamphaeng Phet, Thai epidemiologists were asked to visit a hospital near Bangkok, where a woman had symptoms that matched those caused by the virus. It turned out to be a false alarm, but while the investigators were there a nurse took one of the doctors aside and mentioned that another woman had just died of similar flu symptoms. The death hadn't been reported, but the victim's last name sounded familiar, and so did the name of her village.

"It was just a fluke," Scott Dowell told me not long ago over tea in his office, on the sprawling campus of the Thai Ministry of Public Health, in the suburbs north of Bangkok. "Sure enough, the woman was the mother of that eleven-year-old girl. We would never have known if that nurse didn't happen to mention it." Dowell is the director of the Thailand office of the International Emerging Infections Program, which was established by the Centers for Disease Control in 2001. The group, which was among the first to identify SARS when that new virus appeared, is a front-line outpost dedicated to preventing the spread of infectious disease in a world where modern travel, global commerce, and porous borders mean that any new pathogen—whether a lethal strain of influenza, H.I.V., or the synthetic creation of a bioterrorist—may be no more than a plane ride away. Thailand is not nearly as poor as some of its neighbors, but its fertile climate and lengthy borders with Cambodia and Laos—neither of which has a credible public-health system—produce a continual stream of odd, and often deadly, infectious diseases. The Nipah virus, which is named for the village in Malaysia where it was discovered, in 1999, has been endemic; so have dengue and leptospirosis, a bacterial infection that affects humans and animals. Thai-

"One day, they're all alive and healthy," a Thai chicken farmer said. "The next day, they're dying by the thousand."



JACQUES DE LOUSTAL

"It's been weeks since you bought me exculpatory lilies."

land also has serious epidemics of tuberculosis and H.I.V.

Now there is little on people's minds but the flu. "Our Thai colleagues called us and said, 'Hey, do you want to go to Kamphaeng Phet?' " Dowell said. "And on the way up there they told me the story. And I just said, 'We absolutely have to get hold of this virus.' This could be the first clear case of person-to-person transmission, the beginning of something very significant, something terrifying. So the girl had died and been cremated, and the mother was dead and embalmed. She was literally at the wat, awaiting cremation. The Thai doctor who was riding in the car with me was calling on his mobile phone to the team there, telling them to do whatever they had to do to hold that embalmed body out and take some blood or a tissue sample."

A pandemic is the viral equivalent of a perfect storm. There are three essential conditions, which rarely converge, and they are impossible to predict. But the requirements are clear. A new flu virus must emerge from the animal reservoirs that have always produced and harbored such viruses—one that has never infected human beings and therefore one to which no person would have antibodies. Second, the virus has to actually make humans sick. (Most don't.) Finally, it must be able to spread efficiently—through coughing, sneezing, or a handshake. For H5N1, the first two conditions have been met; it's new and it's deadly. On the ride to Kamphaeng Phet, Dowell couldn't stop wondering whether the virus had met the third condition, too.

If so, there would be little time to distribute medicine, develop a vaccine, establish quarantines, and plan to care for the millions—maybe tens of millions—of sick and dying people throughout the world. "That was why it was so important to get blood or tissue samples, for us to be able to know how this woman died," Dowell said. "Then we get up to the province and we go to the hospital where the girl was and the mother is dead and in comes the aunt and she has had a cough and fever for five days and she is complaining of a sore throat." Dowell and his colleagues grew even more alarmed. What had at first seemed like a coincidence now looked more like the start of an epidemic. "It really had to be human transmission, because there were no other cases in the village," Dowell told me. "Nobody tested positive for the virus. All the chickens had been killed, and the mother didn't even live there; she never encountered a chicken. There was just no other way for her to get sick."

Infectious-disease experts talk about pandemics the way geologists talk about earthquakes; the discussion is never about *whether* "the big one" will hit. Pandemics have recurred in cycles for centuries. The great flu of 1918 killed at least fifty million people and infected hundreds of millions of others. In the United States, it took more lives than all combat in the twentieth century. Hospitals and medical staffs were overwhelmed. Treatment of other diseases stopped. Less severe pandemics occurred in 1957 and in 1968, but each killed millions. The evidence in Thailand seemed to point toward a single conclusion. As it turned out, however, the virus was contained. The third condition for a pandemic had not been met: the aunt, who eventually recovered, and the mother, who did not, almost certainly became sick because each had spent so many hours with the girl; the virus had not mutated in such a way that it could pass easily among people.

Now, speaking in his office, Dowell was calm. "The world just has no idea what it's going to see if this thing comes," he said. Then he stopped himself and started over. "When, really. It's when. I don't think we can afford the luxury of the word 'if' anymore. We are past 'if's. Whether it's tomorrow or next year or some other time, nobody knows for sure. The clock is ticking. We just don't know what time it is."

On October 14th, the four hundred and forty-one black-striped Bengal tigers at the Sriracha Tiger Zoo, near Bangkok, began to die. They had been fed raw chicken carcasses from a local slaughterhouse. Each day, four or five developed symptoms of severe influenza. By the end of the month, forty-five were dead; more than a hundred others were infected and considered a danger to the remaining tigers as well as to the humans who tend them. They, too, had to be destroyed. Until 2003, tigers had never been susceptible to avian influenza. H5N1 was evolving rapidly and with unsettling implications.

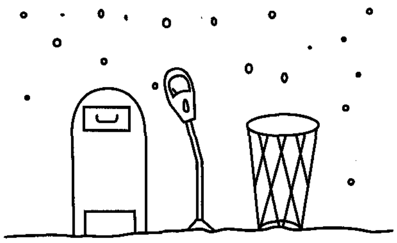
I had stopped at the offices of the World Health Organization, in Geneva, on my way to Thailand. The scientists there were holding a meeting to discuss the feasibility of developing a vaccine that would lessen the impact of a pandemic. The man in charge of the W.H.O. influenza program, Klaus Stöhr, was worried. Despite the mounting signs of danger, few countries or companies had taken the possibility of a pandemic seriously, and there was little interest in developing a vaccine. Stöhr has one of the trickiest jobs in the world of public health: remaining unruffled while racing to prepare for the worst. It is never easy to sound the alarm for an epidemic that might or might not soon sweep the earth. When I asked if Stöhr, who trained as a veterinarian, could assess the danger that H5N1 posed for humans, he sat down and sighed. "Let's take a step back for a moment," he said. "We know that during the last three pandemics—1918, 1957, 1968—all these viruses had genes that derived from animals. In 1918, the virus had consisted almost wholly of avian genes. Now we have a very powerful animal virus circulating in Asia that is already moving into humans. It is very widespread. The virus has changed its characteristics over the past few months. It is now highly pathogenic to chickens. It is infecting an increasing number of species—we now know that cats are susceptible. And they don't just start coughing and sneezing, either. They die."

He went on, "We know that the virus may have got a foothold in ducks, many of which, unlike chickens, appear to stay healthy. That's good news for ducks, but it can be very bad news for us, because controlling a disease that is spread through a hidden reservoir of highly mobile birds is much more difficult." Ducks are particularly dangerous, because they can carry in their digestive systems each strain of the virus—there are fifteen—that affects humans. Stöhr compared them to Trojan horses deployed throughout the world. I asked whether any of this information suggested that the virus was on the verge of a global assault on humanity. "Well, we can't say with certainty," he replied. "But take the example of a football player. Maybe he is even a bad football player. So he's kicking the ball ten, fifteen, twenty times toward the goal before he scores. And a good player does it once. This virus is not a good scorer. But even the worst scorer is going to make it one time. And in this game it's going to take only one goal for the virus to win."

It is hard to overstate the damage that the death of sixty million chickens has caused to Thailand's national psyche. Until last year, the country had been the world's fourth-largest exporter of poultry. That ended with the first reliable reports of infection. Both the European Union and the United States have suspended imports from several countries of Southeast Asia. (China, which may have an even more serious problem, no longer exports poultry.) In Thailand, although there are many commercial producers, a large part of the poultry population remains with families and in small households. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations has estimated that two hundred million farmers in the region keep an average of about fifteen birds each—ducks, chickens, geese, turkeys, and quail. Most of these birds are free to scavenge in their yards, making them prone to infection from the migrating fowl that travel the seasonal flyways from Siberia and northern China.

There is a natural tension between the people who are responsible for a country's commercial agricultural production and those whose job is to safeguard public health. Chinese leaders, worried about trade and tourism, lied about SARS for months when it first appeared—ensuring that the virus would spread. Thailand has just put more than a hundred million dollars into the fight against avian influenza, but when early reports of an illness characteristic of the virus first surfaced there, more than a year ago, that government, too, was reluctant to act.

"It was difficult to persuade officials in this country to take the problem seriously," Prasert Thongcharoen, one of Thailand's most distinguished microbiologists, told me shortly after I'd arrived in Bangkok. We met one morning in his spartan office at Siriraj Hospital, on the Chao Phraya River. "I believe the Department of Livestock at first covered it up. I talked to farmers. At the very first sign of a problem, the department told the public that the chickens had cholera. But farmers said it wasn't cholera. If a chicken has cholera, you give it antibiotics and it gets better. These birds got sick one evening and the next day they were dead. That's not cholera. So I believe it was known, and it spread here at least from October, 2003. One year ago or more. And why didn't the veterinarians realize that? It's not difficult to make that diagnosis. They didn't do the right thing. I'm not saying it would have stopped an epidemic, but they didn't do what they should have done."



The next morning, I went with a woman from the World Health Organization to visit some farmers in Suphan Buri, a province about sixty-five miles north of Bangkok—a straight shot on the wide-open, recently completed freeway. Water buffalo grazed by roadside thickets of bamboo. Acres of bright-green rice paddies bent low in the breeze. Suphan Buri is a relatively prosperous province, thanks to the efforts of Banharn Silpa-archa, the former Prime Minister, who is from the area and whose political party long controlled agricultural development. It is a center of the Thai poultry industry and has been devastated by the epidemic. In Suphan Buri, chickens and ducks had been living in groups of between five thousand and ten thousand, often in long wooden coops spread out on stilts, and perched on top of a pond.

Finding a chicken in Suphan Buri proved to be a challenge. Farmers had been forced out of the business and were unwilling to talk. Most of their flocks had been killed. The government compensated the farmers generously, but the money didn't make up for their losses, or persuade many to switch to a more regimented way of raising birds: coops now have to be built on land, where chicken feces can't contaminate the water. It's hard to change the habits of a nation, particularly when it costs a great deal and may be futile. After driving for about an hour—from empty farm to shuttered coop—we came upon a seventy-year-old farmer working a fishpond next to an abandoned chicken house. The man had deep-brown skin and a remarkably youthful face. He wore a long-sleeved white shirt and black knee-high rubber boots over clay-colored cotton pants. He had a dark-blue baseball cap on his head. Like many of his neighbors, he was a contract farmer who raised chickens for one of the conglomerates. Influenza had ruined him, he told me; all forty thousand of his chickens had died. He hired an earth mover to stuff the chickens into their coffins—giant blue-and-orange feed bags. "I could put thirty chickens in each bag," he said. He then used a crane to lift the bags into mass graves next to a copse of bamboo on his property. He pointed to a low rise and shook his head. "It's damn hard to watch," he said. "One day, they're all alive and healthy—the vets were here the week before to check them—and the next day they're dying by the thousand. It happened so quickly. They started shivering, thousands of them at once. And then they started to fall. Every one of them. They just fell over, dead." He said that he's stopped raising chickens, and that he's fed up with the government. He can't afford to switch to the enclosed system of housing poultry that Thailand now requires. "I'm too old, and you have to inspect everything every day," he said. "It's ridiculous. Under the new rules, you have to change clothes even when you go into one of the chicken houses. Who do you think is going to do that?"

I asked who he thought was responsible for the current situation. "Well, the bird flu came here from Hong Kong, like most diseases do," he said. "And SARS, too. But once it's here I'm not sure how you get rid of it. And I'm not sure how you keep it from coming. They have killed millions of chickens, but are they going to kill every single one?"

The farmer is not entirely out of the business; he still raises birds for cockfighting, which is a big sport in Thailand. It is also a dangerous one when an avian virus is loose. These animals are often sold in the market, their cages rarely disinfected. People move from farm to farm to buy them. And, now that such activity has become harder, middlemen are often paid to do it. Thousands of people attend cockfights. The government has tried to crack down, citing the ease with which the birds pass viruses to one another and to other animals in the marketplace. But it has not been very successful.

The man shrugged. He is now resigned to raising fish. "Chickens you had for forty days and then sold," he said. "Fish we have to raise for five months." He has sixty thousand fish in his pond. It's hard to know how much food to give them and how to keep birds from swooping down at feeding time and stealing it. "This whole thing is not for me," he said. "I want it back the way it was."

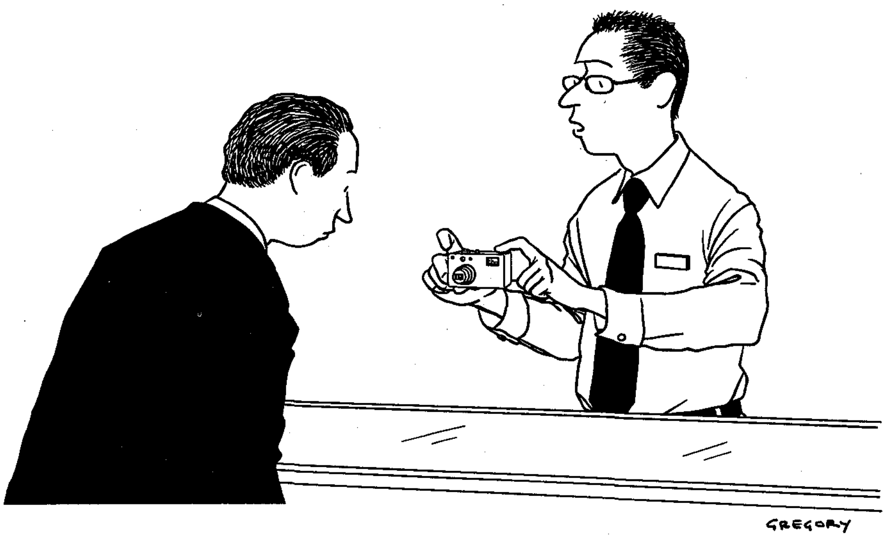
After leaving his farm, we were turned away at several others. The longhouses in the paddies all seemed empty. Eventually, for fifty baht—a little more than a dollar—I persuaded a man on a motorcycle to lead us toward the tree line, across a small bridge, and into a deep-green pasture next to a brook. The field was filled with some two thousand dark-brown long-billed ducks, penned in by a white picket fence. The din was enormous, even with the car windows closed. The man watching over the birds was protective of the owner, but he finally told us how to find her.

Saijai Phetsringharn is a forty-year-old woman who wears diamond rings on her fingers and gold bracelets on her wrists. As a wholesaler of duck eggs—she earns about two baht apiece—Phetsringharn is something of an avian activist, and she has strong opinions about how to stop the epidemic, which she has voiced frequently in public protests. "Vaccinate the animals," she said. "The government needs to vaccinate the chickens."

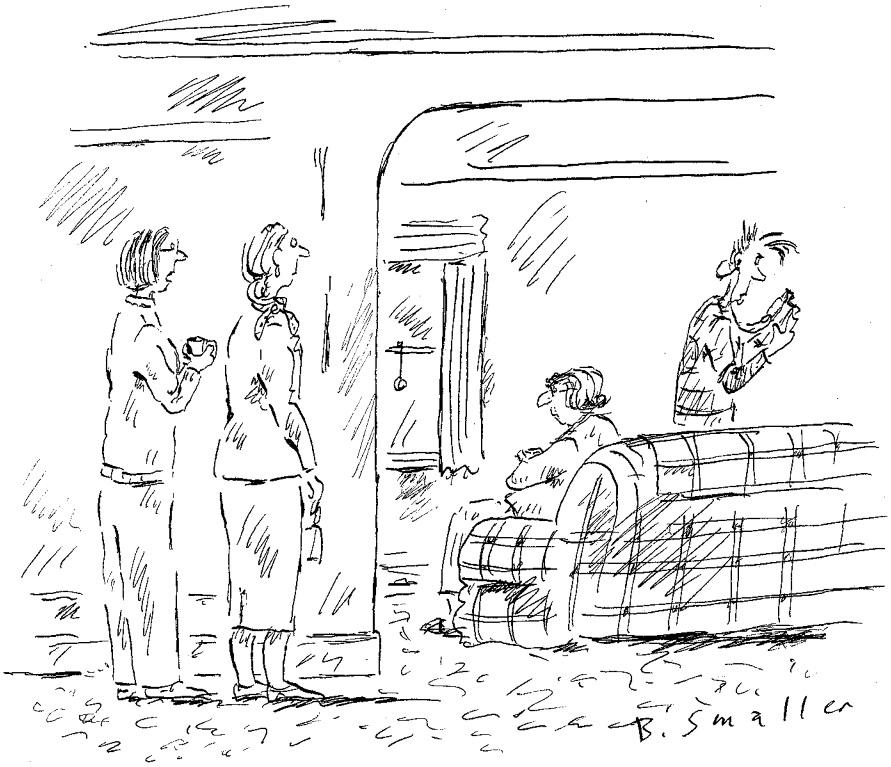
Vaccines for chickens do exist, but there are no consistent guidelines on how to use them. Both China and Indonesia—which do not export poultry—vaccinate their birds. But, so far, the Thai government has refused to adopt the practice. There are legitimate reasons for that: it takes time for the vaccines to work, and they may not always prevent the birds from becoming infected or from passing the virus on. In theory, that means humans could be exposed to healthy-looking birds that nonetheless carry the virus. Still, many public-health officials, including Scott Dowell, of the C.D.C., told me that it was time for the Thai government to reconsider the policy. Some villages are taking matters into their own hands, using herbs on the chickens, which many think will protect them.

"The government seems to think they can solve this problem just by killing birds," Phetsringharn said, mentioning that eight thousand of her ducks had recently been killed. "They are wrong. If they do that, the virus will persist but our industry will die."

She may be right, but recent genetic studies of the virus have determined that, while the ducks remain healthy, they are now shedding larger amounts of the virus and for longer periods than they did just a year ago. Last week, the government proposed a vast new culling—of three million free-range ducks.



"And this light here lets you know when the camera is obsolete."



"I'm in the sandwich generation—my parents don't approve of me and my kids hate me."

"Ducks are not like chickens," Phetsringharn said. "They need their freedom." She was standing in a garage stacked high with trays of large brown eggs. Many boxes of fowl-cholera vaccine were lined up on the floor. She is at least the third generation of her family to raise ducks. "We did it before I was born. Before my mother was born." She has three children, who are four, ten, and thirteen, and she expects them to enter the business, too. "If there is a business," she said, frowning.

• •

Influenza is the sixth-leading cause of death in the United States, and it is responsible for even more damage in less-developed countries. During most flu seasons, as much as twenty per cent of the American population becomes infected, about thirty-six thousand people might die, and more than two hundred thousand are admitted to hospitals. Few viruses have endured as long or done as much damage. Records of respiratory ailments that appear to have been influenza go back to ancient Greece and Rome. The word "influenza" derives from the Latin *influentia*—"influence"—reflecting the common belief that the epidemics it caused were due to the influence of the stars. People—often even doctors—refer casually to any respiratory infection as "the flu," but most are not. Influenza is caused by an orthomyxovirus, which comes in three types, designated A, B, and C. The B and C forms can infect people and make them sick, but they're not common and they're rarely serious. Type A is the virus we worry about. Every influenza virus has hundreds of microscopic spikes rising from its surface. Most are made of a viral protein called hemagglutinin, which can latch onto cells that the virus seeks to enter. The other spikes are called neuraminidase, an enzyme that helps the virus spread. These two proteins are the reason that flu viruses are labelled with the letters "H" and "N." Type A influenza has been so successful for so long because it is among the most mutable of viruses, capable of swapping or altering one or more of its eight genes with those from other strains.

Because this virus evolves so quickly, an annual flu shot is at best a highly educated bet on which strain is most likely to infect you. The vaccine stimulates antibodies that should provide protection from the particular strain of the virus that epidemiologists think will predominate this year. But, if you are infected with a flu virus whose surface proteins have changed, your antibodies won't recognize them fully. That new strain could edge its way past the human immune system's complicated defenses and establish a new infection, and—though you might have some resistance, depending on how the strain had changed—you would need an entirely new set of antibodies to fight it. This goes on throughout our lives, and these small changes on the surface of the virus—the antigen—are called "antigenic drift."

The eight viral flu genes are put together in segments a bit like a line of connected Lego blocks, and they are easily dismantled, changed, and reassembled. When animal strains of influenza mix with human strains, there is always the possibility that the result will be an entirely new virus. That is called "antigenic shift." When large fragments of genetic material are replaced with genes from other influenza subtypes, or with genes from other animals, like pigs or chickens, the outcome is something that the human immune system will be unable to recognize. And, even with the sophisticated tools of molecular genetics, we cannot predict how a virus will change or when or whether it will become more or less dangerous. We don't even know if survival of the fittest, when it comes to viruses, means survival of the most virulent: a virus so powerful that it kills all its hosts couldn't last long.

The elaborate transportation system for a flu virus adds to the chance nature of its evolution. The midpoint between Thailand and the Northern Hemisphere is Guangdong province, in southern China. Migrating birds often stop there, which may be one reason that so many epidemics begin in the region. The chances that an animal virus will jump the species barrier are greater in places with constant contact between humans and animals. Sixty per cent of the world's people—and billions of its animals—live in Asia. There are eighty-six million people in Guangdong alone—more than the population of

Germany. Every day, tens of thousands of chickens are moved by truck from Guangdong to Hong Kong. Agriculture, too, plays a role. Rice, the ubiquitous crop of Asia, needs water. Farmers raise ducks on the rice farms and on their ponds, and wild waterfowl can transmit their virus to domestic ducks there. The ducks can then pass it along to chickens and pigs, which often serve as a mixing vessel for human- and animal-flu viruses, because the receptors on their respiratory cells are similar to ours. In such an environment, one sneeze from a pig could be enough to start a pandemic.

When the Bush Administration's Health and Human Services Secretary Tommy Thompson announced his resignation, in December, he cited a potential epidemic of avian influenza as one of the greatest dangers facing the United States. The World Health Organization has put a "conservative estimate" of the deaths from such an event at between two and seven million people and expects that as many as a billion people would fall ill. Other numbers are even more sobering: Michael Osterholm, the director of the Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy at the University of Minnesota, has made calculations based on the 1918 epidemic, taking into consideration general improvements in health care. Applying those fatality rates to the world's current population, Osterholm suggests that at least a hundred and eighty million people would die in a pandemic of similar severity. Shigeru Omi, the W.H.O. official in charge of Asia, recently arrived at similar conclusions, stating that an H5N1 pandemic could infect between twenty-five per cent and thirty per cent of the world's population. Economic losses would be in the tens of billions of dollars.

Robert Webster, who holds a chair in virology at St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, in Memphis, has been studying avian influenza for decades. Nobody knows more about the origins of the virus, how it changes, or what those changes might mean. "This is the worst flu virus I have ever seen or worked with or read about," he told me when we spoke recently. "We have to prepare as if we were going to war—and the public needs to understand that clearly. This virus is playing its role as a natural bioterrorist. The politicians are going to say Chicken Little is at it again. And, if I'm wrong, then thank God. But if it does happen, and I fully expect that it will, there will be no place for any of us to hide. Not in the United States or in Europe or in a bunker somewhere. The virus is a very promiscuous and efficient killer. That much we have known since 1997."

Pandemics seem to occur every thirty or forty years. On May 21, 1997, three decades after the previous outbreak, a three-year-old boy in Hong Kong died from what doctors were fairly certain was the flu. The most densely packed city on earth, Hong Kong has often served as a cauldron for viral diseases and a transit point for epidemics. In 1894, a plague killed more than a hundred thousand people there after arriving from China. The two flu pandemics that swept the world in the past fifty years each appeared first in China, then in Hong Kong. In 2003, SARS originated in China, incubated in Hong Kong, and then fanned out across the globe. Health authorities in Hong Kong have every reason to be vigilant about unusual signs of illness.

The boy's doctor had forwarded a routine sample of his respiratory secretions to researchers at the Department of Health. Something about the structure and arrangement of the viral strain seemed strange to them. Clearly, it was a flu virus, but not a strain the Hong Kong scientists had seen before. They sent samples to research centers in England and the Netherlands and to the C.D.C., in Atlanta. It took three months before specialists at the three institutions could agree on what they were looking at through their microscopes. It was H5N1, which until then had affected only poultry. Not even farmers who handled sick birds every day had become ill.

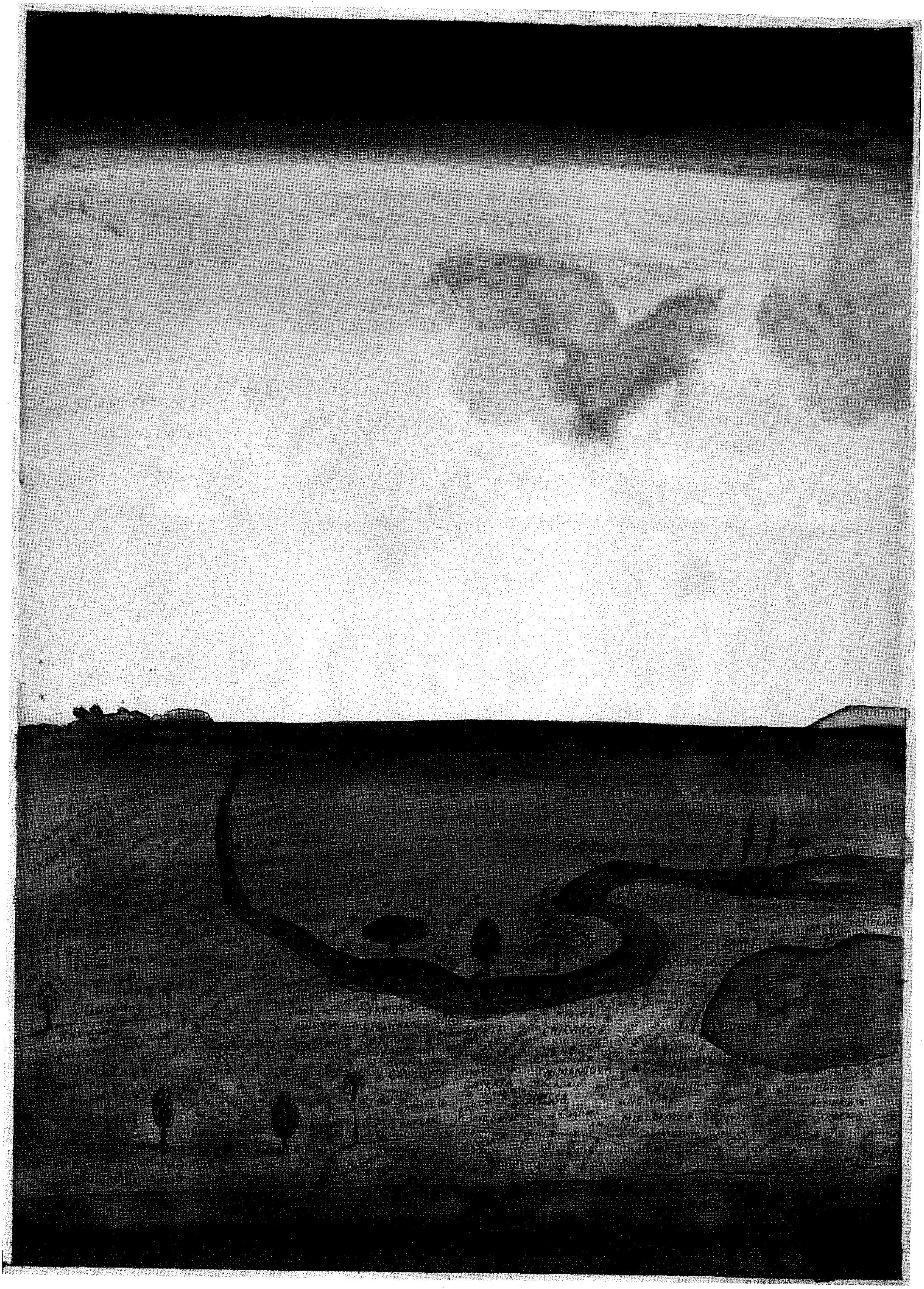
As soon as the strain was identified, Keiji Fukuda, the chief flu epidemiologist at the C.D.C., left for Hong Kong. The possibilities frightened him, but he was also excited by the opportunity to investigate a genuine medical mystery. How could that virus have infected a three-year-old child? Fukuda and his colleagues from the C.D.C.

PORTFOLIO

MAP OF SAUL

Never sure of his beginnings, the late Saul Steinberg invented the Romanian city of Râmnicul Sărat as a place "for me to be born in," and put it downstream from Hatteras, and not far from Laramie, Waikiki, and Juneau, in this 1966 drawing of the wandery river of his life. The piece, designed as a *New Yorker* cover but not run, appears at last in a new book, "Steinberg at *The New Yorker*," by Joel Smith, and at the current exhibition of the same name at the PaceWildenstein Gallery, each celebrating a unique conjunction of artist and institution. During a fifty-eight-year outpouring of eloquent surprises that did not quite end with his death, in 1999, Steinberg produced eighty-nine covers for this magazine, along with six hundred and fifty cartoons and drawings, and five hundred-odd spreads and multi-page features. Maps became a favorite Steinbergian theme—as did handwriting, labels, punctuation, numbers, sounds, Americana, thoughts (a fat, blocky capital "E" seeing itself in svelte Caslon type, with French accent), taxis, and alligators. That 1976 map of the United States as seen in narrow view from Ninth Avenue is his best-known (and most pirated) drawing, but other readers might recall a chart of the artist's wiggly route across some back roads of Massachusetts while he tries to follow the dying thread of Mozart's "La Clemenza di Tito" over his car radio. Steinberg called the magazine "my refuge, *patria*, and safety net," and rewarded us with his ceaselessly astounding best. One can picture an afternoon in downtown Râmnicul Sărat, which honors its favorite son with daily parades, grand avenues, pedestals, florid proclamations, statuary, rubber-stamp Indians, thought-laden artists, drum majorettes, and airborne music and exclamation points, all by Saul.

—Roger Angell


SPRINGS
Santo Domingo
CHICAGO
VENEZIA
MANTOVA
CALCUTTA
CASERTA
ODESSA
RIO
NEWARK
BARI
Cagliari

SAUL STEINBERG, "AUTOGEOGRAPHY" © THE SAUL STEINBERG FOUNDATION spent a month in Hong Kong, turning over every piece of evidence they could find. But they saw no other indication that the virus had moved into the human population. "It had not spread to even one other person, so we just wrote it off as a freak occurrence," Fukuda told me when I went to see him in Atlanta. Fukuda is wiry, quiet, and intense—characteristics that underscore his deadpan presentation of facts. "It was weird and a little scary," he told me. "But it was so unexpected to find it in a human being that we eventually decided it must have been one instance involving that boy and that would be the end of it."

The team returned to the United States and moved on to other work. Then, later that year, a fifty-four-year-old man was hospitalized in Hong Kong with the bird flu. By December 5th, he was dead. Fukuda returned to Hong Kong with the same troubling question that would eventually preoccupy his colleagues in Thailand. "I wondered if this virus was now acting like other strains—maybe its genes had mixed with human genes and it was moving freely among people. I remember sitting on the plane and thinking, If this is really happening, my God, what are we in for?" By late December of 1997, eighteen people had become infected in Hong Kong, and six of them died—a remarkably high mortality rate. Researchers couldn't figure out how the virus was getting to humans. In the past, scientists had believed that such mutations required pigs to serve as a mixing vessel. These new cases suggested that H5N1 didn't need an intermediary host; it seemed that the virus had acquired the ability to move directly from birds to people. "I don't know why I remember this, but I do," Fukuda told me long after the events had taken place. "Christmas that year was on a Thursday," he said. "It was a very bad day. There were too many reports of people getting sick. The city just had this bad feeling to it. A heavy feeling."

Fukuda thought that only drastic measures would stop an epidemic, and he said so. The Hong Kong agriculture department, realizing that the virus was spreading rapidly within the poultry markets of the city, agreed. Many bird species were housed together in the markets, an ideal environment for genes from different viruses to mix and mutate. On December 29th, city officials began to kill every chicken in Hong Kong. One and a half million birds were culled, then disinfected and buried in landfills. "All these trucks driving up to a medium-sized poultry farm," Fukuda recalled. "Everyone is covered with protective gear—moon suits and all. They put the birds in bags and then used gas on them. Then they were deposited in the landfills." The decision was risky, but it seemed to work. No one else became ill, and many public-health experts believed that the slaughter in Hong Kong had prevented a horrifying epidemic. For several years, there were no other reports of the virus infecting a human being; some people even dared to hope that H5N1 had been vanquished. Fukuda was not so sure. He knew how risky—and potentially dangerous—such assumptions about infectious diseases can be. Then, in early 2003, Fukuda's fears were confirmed. A nine-year-old boy and his father were hospitalized in Hong Kong with the bird flu. The boy recovered, but on February 17th his father died.

MEMOIR

Orwell says somewhere that no one ever writes the real story of their life.
The real story of a life is the story of its humiliations.
If I wrote that story now—
radioactive to the end of time—
people, I swear, your eyes would fall out, you couldn't peel
the gloves fast enough
from your hands scorched by the firestorms of that shame.
Your poor hands. Your poor eyes
to see me weeping in my room
or boring the tall blonde to death.
Once I accused the innocent.
Once I bowed and prayed to the guilty.
I still wince at what I once said to the devastated widow.
And one October afternoon, under a locust tree
whose blackened pods were falling and making
illuminating patterns on the pathway,
I was seized by joy,
and someone saw me there,
and that was the worst of all,
lacerating and unforgettable.

—*Vijay Seshadri*

That month, officials from the World Health Organization's rapid-alert team began hearing reports of a "strange contagious disease" that had attacked scores of people in Guangdong province, which borders Hong Kong. A month earlier, geese had suddenly started to die in several Hong Kong parks. Klaus Stöhr, of the W.H.O., happened to be attending a meeting in Beijing to help China develop a national flu-vaccine strategy. As Stöhr listened to each province report its general-health information, he became increasingly alarmed. Finally, an official from Guangdong stood up and spoke about an outbreak of what seemed like an unusually powerful flu. People were dying, and it was difficult to understand why. "I just put two and two together and it added up," Stöhr told me a few months later. "I thought this must be H5N1 coming back in precisely the way we had all feared. It was our worst nightmare—and the world's."

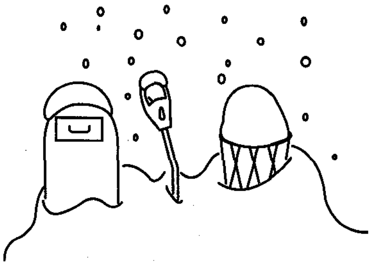
In the end, the illness that the Chinese were talking about turned out to be SARS, and scientists throughout the infectious-disease community, though concerned about the dangers of the new virus, took a deep breath. But the confusion was understandable. The early symptoms of SARS seemed a lot like those of the flu. And nobody expected this entirely new virus. Hong Kong went into economic, social, and psychological shock. Taxi-drivers disinfected their cabs (and advertised the fact on banners that flew from their windows) each time they dropped off a passenger. Subway ridership plummeted, and people who were brave enough to use the system wore white cotton masks—which, like antibacterial hand lotions, were selling briskly at every kiosk in the city. Restaurants and hotels were either shuttered or nearly empty. Headlines flashed constantly across every television set: "Outbreak," "In the Shadow of the Virus," and "Fear Across Asia." For the first time, the W.H.O. issued a global health alert that advised travellers to avoid Hong Kong and Guangdong province unless they had no choice. Billions of dollars in revenues were lost, unemployment reached record levels, tourism vanished, and the epidemic pushed the city of seven million to the edge of its third recession in a decade.

Since SARS first appeared, it has killed fewer than a thousand people; during that time, a larger number drowned in bathtubs and swimming pools in the U.S. The fears weren't altogether irrational, however. SARS was the first serious, easily transmitted disease to emerge in the twenty-first century, and the first in decades to move from animals to humans while also mutating into an illness that could be spread simply by breathing. More important, perhaps, coming not long after the anthrax scare of 2001, SARS reminded a world of something that it seemed to have forgotten—how easily it could be disabled by disease.

Early one morning, I drove to Sa Kaeo, a province about two hours east of Bangkok, on the Cambodian border. There, and in a province near Laos, Scott Dowell's C.D.C. team has established a sort of radar defense system for microbes—the International Emerging Infections Program. The idea came about simply enough: the United States wants to protect itself from foreign threats, and in the nineteen-nineties—after confronting a series of new viral diseases—public-health officials argued persuasively that such unexpected infections posed a threat that the United States was not prepared to meet. Zoonotic diseases—animal illnesses that infect humans and make them sick—caused particular concern. Since the viruses often appear in densely populated Third World countries, the C.D.C. set up its first operation in Thailand. A second office opened last year, in Kenya. "The feeling was that maybe if we were out there with our ear to the ground, listening and watching, we might be able to catch something before it's too late," Mark Simmerman, who is with the C.D.C. in Bangkok, told me as we drove. "So we decided to look very carefully at the residents of these two provinces."

The I.E.I.P. team has more than a million residents under surveillance for signs of pneumonia and other bacterial infections. (The theory is that if you look at lung X-rays and blood work closely enough to detect pneumonia you are also likely to detect other significant problems.) Every morning, in every hospital, a surveillance officer reviews the previous day's admission logs. Whenever there is a questionable notation in the reports, doctors review it further. Technicians in the field are equipped to scan the X-rays and send them electronically to labs where more sophisticated analysis is possible. There have already been some successes: the program has helped raise the profile of influenza, which had traditionally been ignored by most Thais; it has made it easier for the provincial leadership to convince people that sick birds can be dangerous to humans. The team helped identify SARS, of course, and Dowell was one of the authors of the initial report characterizing the virus.

The C.D.C. selected Thailand as the first country for the program in part because the government there was agreeable and committed. But there are other reasons. Health care is good. There are emergency rooms, antibiotics, and clinics. That is not true in neighboring Cambodia, however. Each day, thousands of Cambodian workers surge into Thailand—and often return home within forty-eight hours. The movement is never one-way; gambling is illegal in Thailand but not in Cambodia. Travel from Bangkok has increased markedly during the past three years. "This is sort of the classic situation we are facing in the world today," Nancy Cox told me before I left for Thailand. Cox is the chief of the influenza branch at the C.D.C., and she has been a strong advocate for establishing these listening posts, which are modelled on several that already exist in the United States. "We have Laos and Cambodia, which have fewer resources and much less of an infrastructure to deal with something like avian influenza or to do surveillance than they do in Thailand. And that really poses a perpetual danger, because they could be having outbreaks there that we simply are unable to know about. We are dealing with a difficult situation, and one that, unfortunately, looks like it will be with us for some time."

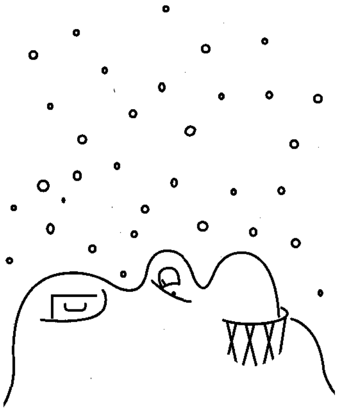


Our first stop was a village about forty kilometres from the border. It was a hot, airless day, and people weren't moving unless they had to. Seventy-five per cent of the residents keep birds. Thailand has nine hundred thousand volunteers to watch over the health of its provincial villages. Each volunteer is responsible for a few households, and tries to monitor the health of the people and even of the animals in his or her domain. A weekly bird census is taken—when I was there, there were 84,563 birds in the district. "Paying close attention this way may make the difference," Simmerman told me. "Maybe this will be the place where we will, in the end, see a cluster where the virus has begun to change. And, if so, we can hope to contain it far earlier than if we waited to see something like that in Bangkok or Hong Kong."

I spent some time with one of the health volunteers, a woman named Samorn Santhhape, who was wearing a yellow polo shirt and a floral-print skirt. We sat for a while on the stoop of a house and watched the chickens clucking and strutting about on the barren ground in front of us. There were about ten houses within sight, and at all of them the scene was the same. Each family owned about twenty chickens.

"These people are worried about this flu," she told me. "But they are more worried about losing their birds and the way they live. They are sometimes resentful of government announcements that tell them what to do." Animals have been kept in this way in Thailand for centuries, and many villagers feel that a basic right has come under attack. Yet any government that ignored such a severe threat to its animals and its people would be negligent. "What did we do wrong?" the woman at whose house we sat asked. She offered us tea, then rice and fruit. "We love our animals and treat them as well as we can." That seems to be true. Santhhape told me that there was a feeling of hopelessness. "When the chickens do get sick, they are dead before we even have time to notice," she said. "Sometimes it feels like we are trying to halt what we cannot even see."

If the avian epidemic does move widely into human populations, as many scientists have predicted, it will mark the first time the world has been able to anticipate a pandemic. For thousands of years, people have rarely known the causes of their illnesses; they have certainly never been warned that an epidemic—whether smallpox, plague, cholera, or influenza—was imminent. Viral genetics has changed that. We can follow the evolution of a virus on a molecular level and gauge its power. Researchers at the C.D.C. have just begun crucial experiments in specially protected laboratories where they will attempt to juggle the genetic components of the H5N1 virus. There are two ways to do that. First, the team will infect tissue with both the bird virus and a common human flu virus and see what grows. They will also use the tools of genetics. Molecular biology now allows scientists to break a virus down to its genes; the researchers will disassemble H5N1 and mix it in a variety of combinations with human flu viruses. Then they will test the results on animals.



There are other preparations under way, too, of course, but they face significant financial, ethical, and political obstacles. The Bush Administration has put hundreds of millions of dollars into flu preparedness. Largely, that commitment reflects a world after 2001, in which it is not hard to convince leaders that if a natural virus can move quickly from Asia to America so could one that is produced by terrorists. Vaccines would provide the most effective protection at the lowest cost. Yet even vaccines won't solve a crisis. First, the world does not yet have the capacity to produce hundreds of millions of doses of an annual flu vaccine at the same time that it prepares for a pandemic strain like H5N1. In fact, this year the United States had trouble simply producing the annual vaccine. That became painfully apparent last October, when the government was forced to announce that a plant owned by one of its two principal manufacturers—Chiron Corporation—had been shut down by British licensing authorities. This delayed annual shots for millions of Americans. Currently, the world can produce three hundred million doses of flu vaccine a year—but there are more than six billion people, and in 1957 the pandemic crossed the globe in less than eight months. The ideal solution would be to develop vaccines that could offer protection from all influenza subtypes. Many public-health officials argue that such a vaccine should become a basic goal, like finding vaccines for AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria. Without that, even if we could produce a billion doses of a new flu vaccine, which would we make? H5N1 might evolve so rapidly that a shot that would protect us today could prove useless six months from now. And who would get those vaccines? The most rational public-health approach would be to vaccinate those who would first be exposed—health-care workers and people in the region where an epidemic has struck. That is unlikely to happen. "Can you see the developed world shipping all its vaccine to Vietnam in a genuine crisis?" one senior U.S. public-health official told me. "Who are you kidding?"

The antiviral drug oseltamivir phosphate should protect against avian influenza. (It binds to one of the surface proteins and prevents the virus from multiplying.) The U.S. government has enough of the drug to treat 2.3 million people. It's made by one company, and a course of treatment costs more than sixty dollars. If the infections were spreading in Chicago or London, flooding the city with the drug might help. But in Thailand, Cambodia, or Vietnam? Not many people in those countries could come up with that kind of money—or find the drug even if they could. "This is where we can really have a remarkable effect," Bruce Gellin told me. Gellin is the director of the U.S. National Vaccine Program Office, and he spends most of his time these days trying to persuade governments and public officials to make the possibility of a pandemic a priority. "We need to realize that the stuff will be in short supply but that we can use it effectively," he said. "My analogy is a spark and a squirt gun. If you aim properly, you can get the spark and be done with it. If you miss, though, the fire is going to spread and there is nothing you can do to stop it."

What if the world did pay enough attention to what seems like an obvious threat? With the current knowledge about viral genetics, can we think about preventing the transmission of an epidemic of H5N1 from animals to people, or from Africa or Asia to Europe and America? Or could we contemplate achieving similar success with the Ebola virus or hemorrhagic fevers or Nipah or a new form of a hantavirus or some other exotic, and unidentified, disease? If you look at the ProMED daily report on the Internet—most infectious-disease experts read it every morning—the answer would appear to be no. The report, compiled by the International Society for Infectious Diseases, collects and forwards information about novel or important outbreaks of infectious diseases wherever they are found. And they are found everywhere: in the past several weeks, papaya ring-spot virus has appeared in southern India, Newcastle disease has returned to the chickens of Japan, and in January the Canadian Food Inspection Agency reported two cases of mad-cow disease. A woman with melioidosis, which is endemic in Southeast Asia, died on the southwest Indian Ocean island of Mauritius, the first known death there from the disease. There is no information about how the bacteria—often cited as a potential agent for biological terrorism—travelled five thousand miles.

"We are certainly better than we ever were at detecting viruses," Supamit Chunsuttiwat, who is one of the senior infectious-disease officials at the Thai Ministry of Public Health, told me. "But we are also much better at spreading them. A hundred years ago, the Nipah virus would have simply emerged and died out; instead, it was transmitted to pigs and amplified. With modern agriculture, the pigs are transported long distances to slaughter. And the virus goes with them." Few, if any, organisms have benefitted from travel more than viruses have. For nearly fifty million years, the earth has been separated into distinct continents. Those continents were essentially walled off by geographic barriers. A virus could emerge, evolve, and move between species. But it could never pick up and move from, say, China to Montana. When smallpox emerged, three thousand years ago, it would have killed the population around it and stayed where it was; but in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries sailing vessels carried smallpox—and measles and yellow fever—between the Old World and the New World.

These kinds of health problem were supposed to have been dispensed with by now; by the late nineteen-sixties, the Surgeon General had even announced that it was time to close the book on infectious disease. Polio, measles, and tuberculosis, major causes of death for centuries, no longer posed a serious threat in the United States. Good nutrition and living conditions helped; so did clean water. More important, immunization had taken many common diseases off the map, and the discovery of antibiotics had provided almost miracle cures for others. By the time the World Health Organization declared that smallpox had been eradicated, in 1979, cures had come to be expected.

"Don't think of it as a conspiracy charge. Think of it as a buddy trial."

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Yet infectious diseases may present more of a danger than ever before. Late last week, for example, the W.H.O. reported that scores of miners had died of pneumonic plague over the past two months in the Democratic Republic of Congo—the largest such outbreak in decades. And in 2003 alone, in addition to the SARS epidemic, monkeypox broke out for the first time in the Western Hemisphere (monkeypox causes symptoms that are similar to those of smallpox, but—at least for now—it is not nearly as contagious); West Nile disease continued its insidious spread across North America; and mad-cow disease appeared for the first time in the United States.

Other parts of the world, too, are experiencing the effects of infectious diseases that have never before been encountered. Rift Valley fever, an acute viral disease, suddenly infected hundreds of people in Yemen and Saudi Arabia in 2000—the first time it had been seen outside the African continent. Epidemiologists were amazed. "We never thought we would study viruses in Arabia," a senior researcher at the C.D.C. told me. "There is nothing there. We always called it the empty corridor." However, there has been a lot of traffic in animals there, and, in the case of Rift Valley fever, wind may have been enough to spread the virus. New viruses are not the only problem. Yellow fever, which crossed the world in the water barrels of ships, almost stopped the construction of the Panama Canal. The virus remains endemic in the tropics despite many attempts to eradicate it.

Travel, transportation, trade, pollution, and ecological disruption all play a role in assuring the constant flow of disease from one part of the world to another. Last year's tsunami has pushed the world's public-health agencies to their limits. It's not clear how they could respond to a sudden global epidemic as well.

When I was in Sa Kaeo, I sat for a while in the district office with several provincial health officials. On the wall was a giant poster filled with avian-flu information. "Chickens used to live in our back yards—they didn't travel much. Now, throughout the world, farms have become factories," Charun Boonyarithikarn, the chief of social medicine for the district, told me. "Millions of chickens are shipped huge distances every day. We can't stop every chicken or duck or pig. And they offer millions of opportunities for pathogens to find a niche." He shook his head, and smiled. "People around here fly to Hanoi and Phnom Penh and Paris. They visit China. They travel. Well, we have to realize this and accept it: take a plane ride to Paris and you may be taking an epidemic along with you." ♦

PERSONAL HISTORY

THE BEARDS

An adolescence in disguise.

BY JONATHAN LETHEM

THE HEAVENLY MUSIC CORPORATION

(1980–82, Mom dead.)

"No Pussyfooting" is an album by the guitar player Robert Fripp and the keyboard player Brian Eno. The album consists of two songs, or compositions; there are no voices on the record, no lyrics. Unlike other recordings by Fripp and Eno, alone or as members of groups, "No Pussyfooting" doesn't involve studio overdubs. Although the music provides a fullness, an illusion of depth, the two cuts appear to be long improvisations between the players, conducted in real time, within simple boundaries. Side one is made up of achingly long tones, swells of sound that rise and fade. In vocal terms, the instruments groan or wail. They keen. On side two, the tones are frantic with ripples, oscillations. In vocal terms, the instruments ululate. Or orgasm.

Side one is called "The Heavenly Music Corporation." Side two, "Swastika Girls."

I bought "No Pussyfooting" in 1979 or 1980, at the record store on the eighth floor of Abraham & Straus, a palatial department store on Fulton Street, a few blocks from where I lived. My friend Jeremy and I had been going there regularly to browse the long sections of Frank Zappa and Kinks records, and to dare ourselves to spend money on some of the mysterious products we couldn't have investigated otherwise. I was curious about Brian Eno because he was the producer of the newest Talking Heads record. I imagine I selected the two Eno records I bought—"Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy" and "No Pussyfooting"—on the strength of the jacket art, which was alluringly dark and strange, and which had a resemblance to gallery art, as did the jackets of Talking Heads albums.

I also liked the name Eno. It sounded vaguely alien, bliplike, like the names of some of the writers I'd begun to idolize: Lem, Kafka, Poe, Borges.

When I got those records home, "Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy" turned out to be a sequence of songs in conventional rock format, three to six minutes long, mostly with guitars and

drums underlying their creepy, synthesized sound effects and ominous, gnomic lyrics. Perfect, in other words. "No Pussyfooting" was this other thing: a pair of fuzzy electronic suites, which absolutely refused to beguile. I should have filed it in my collection and forgotten it, gravely disappointed, as I'd imagine most of its teen-age buyers were. Instead, I decided I loved "The Heavenly Music Corporation," and hated "Swastika Girls."

I had a room to myself, on the top floor of our house. My bed was on a loft, built above a hivelike construction of desktops and storage spaces. Directly below where I placed my pillow was a wooden compartment that neatly held my amplifier and turntable. I had a set of headphones—absurdly heavy, ear-clamping muffs, connected to the stereo by a mushy, coiled rubber-coated cord, twice as thick as a telephone's.

Late at night, when I was done reading, and had turned off my light, I'd wear the headphones and listen to the twenty-one minutes of "The Heavenly Music Corporation," or as much as I could before it lulled me to sleep. I memorized each swell of guitar and synth, anticipating the moment (which, I've since confirmed, occurs exactly at the ten-minute-and-thirty-second mark) when the synthesizer's repeated plunge toward a certain note suddenly seems to persuade the guitar to follow, so that the second half of the piece becomes a long finishing, an ebbing away.

Some nights, whatever teen-age anxiety or fear thrilled my body kept me awake through the whole piece. So I'd lean over the edge of my bed, still wearing the headphones, and place the needle at the start of the track again. I'd mastered the art of nudging the monstrous phones off my head as I launched into deeper stages of sleep, and I'd wake to find them crammed between the mattress and the wall.

Fripp's long guitar solo was a human voice I grew to know better, most likely, than its maker. His thinking, audible as he tested the surf of Eno's synthesizer, was like a morality only I understood. I covered it in sleep, then bore it out into the day with me, a surrogate brain wave with which to respond to the world.

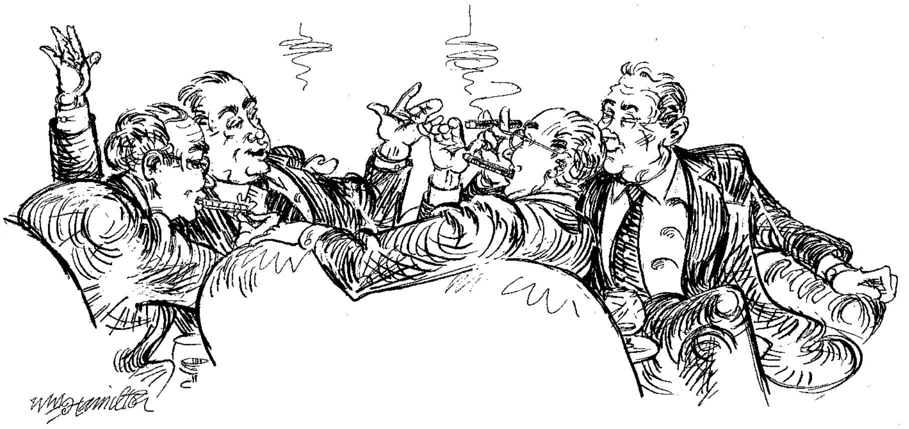
THE MAN WHO FELL TO EARTH

(1976, Mom out of hospital.)

My mother and her boyfriend took me to a midday showing of the Nicolas Roeg film "The Man Who Fell to Earth" at the Quad Cinema on West Thirteenth Street in Manhattan. "The Man Who Fell to Earth" stars David Bowie as a gentle and moody alien visitor to our planet, one who, upon encountering man's inhumanity to alien, becomes increasingly bitter and self-abnegating, until he ends up a decadent and drunken pop star. This was the bowdlerized American release, missing the blatant sex scenes that have since been restored, though David Bowie's attempt to present his "true self" to his human lover, played by Candy Clark—shedding his disguise, he reveals goatlike slit pupils, and a smooth, doll-like bump in place of his genitals—was shocking to me.

As we three stepped back out into the daylight of Manhattan, I was deeply immersed in the spell of the film. I'd been reading Ray Bradbury's "Martian Chronicles" and a handful of other classic science-fiction stories, and *alien equals*

JOHN RITTER



"Who'da thunk guys like us would ever have found ourselves looking forward to Social Security like this?"

• •

alienated was a rebus I grasped. Any one of these people I see walking around me, I remember thinking, in astonishment, as we made our way back to the subway, could be like him. By "like him" I meant, or thought I meant: a secret visitor from another planet. But my wonder at the film was really wonder at the force of my identification with the figure of the misunderstood alien. I didn't for a minute imagine that I wasn't an earthling, so what I really meant was: Any one of these people I see walking around me could be like me. Could feel like me, just as I felt like Bowie. That is to say, subjective, sad, and special.

WISH YOU WERE HERE

(1979 or 1980, Mom dead.)

The party was in the apartment of a man named Louis (some of these names have been changed), who wore his hair in Rastafarian-style dreadlocks, and whose shelves were full of paperback science fiction of the saga variety—Frank Herbert's "Dune" books, and Philip José Farmer's "Riverworld." In the middle of the living room stood a hookah, surrounded by low cushions. I'd been inhaling marijuana from one of the tubes of the hookah, a surprisingly easy thing to do quite a lot of. And I'd been feeling very much a part of this party, which consisted entirely of adults, men and women in their twenties, all of whom seemed to have accepted me as a given in their circle, despite the fact that I'd never been to Louis's apartment before and many of the people there were strangers.

Yet I wasn't mistaken. This mutual comfort was an extension of the degree to which I'd been adopted into the company of my grownup friend Michael, who ran a used-book store on Atlantic Avenue, a few blocks from my home. I'd wandered into Michael's shop one day, attracted not only by the used books that had already become my passion but by the oddness of a ramshackle enterprise that surely reminded me of my parents' milieu. For, improbably, the bookstore on Atlantic was also a puppet theatre, and the home office of a moving company, each in partnership with Michael's friend Larry.

I made myself an immediate sidekick to Michael and Larry, and insisted on apprenticing myself in all three of the trades they ran from the single storefront. I painted backdrops and collected receipts at the puppet shows. (I also rounded up local kids to help make an audience.) I joined them on small moving jobs, more than once mooring the guide rope on a block and tackle as we shifted a couch through the upstairs window of a Brooklyn apartment. And I immersed myself in Michael's bookselling knowledge. Before long, I was opening the shop by myself, on those days when Michael didn't feel like making the trip from his Upper East Side Manhattan apartment. I was apprenticed to Michael as a reader, too, aping his interests in John Cowper Powys, Colin Wilson, and Thomas Berger, and I took home my pay from the shop in books, not cash.

It was in the shop, then, that Michael's friends got to taking the presence of his fifteen-year-old acolyte for granted. Nevertheless, I must have seemed a bit adrift that night, on my pillow at the hookah, grinning and smiling at the women in the room, trying to follow or perhaps insert myself into nearby conversations. I'd inhaled more pot than I ever had before, more than I knew. So Bob, another of Michael's friends, made a small intervention.

Bob was a tall, elegant black man, an actor and a jazz musician—a trumpet player and scat singer, to be exact. That night, at Louis's party, Bob had seen something in my eyes as I sat at the hookah which made him wish if not to rescue then to divert me. He tapped me on my spaced-out shoulder and made me follow him to Louis's bedroom. There he sat me on the edge of the bed and placed a pair of headphones on my ears.

"Listen to this," he said.

"What?" I said.

"Just listen."

Bob pressed a button on a cassette deck. The music that flooded my ears was sensual, ominous, and infinitely protracted, oceanic. The record was Pink Floyd's "Wish You Were Here," which begins with the band's fourteen-minute "Shine On You Crazy Diamond, Parts 1-5," a suite I'd later discover was a beckoning tribute to their former bandmate Syd Barrett, who was lost to drugs and schizophrenia at the end of the sixties. The album is recorded for stereo with such pinpoint hallucinatory clarity that its effect on headphones, in my stoned condition, was to suggest that I'd plunged out of a landscape of two aural dimensions into one of three, or five, or twenty. I felt able to place each of the notes in a precise place in the air before my eyes, to watch them flicker and pulse and vanish like embers.

Bob had given me a gift. It was as though he'd said, "Jonathan, the time for you to pretend you are an adult among adults is through for the night. You're a charming kid and we like you very much, but the strain is showing. So quit pretending you understand things you only half understand, and return yourself to wonderment, to masturbation, to dreaming."

In recollection, the shiny, self-pitying grandeur of Pink Floyd is among the uneasiest tokens of my teen-age tastes. A year or two later, I'd give myself to the band's paranoiac epic "The Wall," memorizing and debating lyrics in the company of friends my own age. With my pals Joel and Donna, I made a pilgrimage to the Nassau Coliseum to see Pink Floyd play the double album live while sharing the stage with a fake wall, which was destroyed at the show's onset by a fake airplane and rebuilt throughout the evening. Then we slumbered in a stoned fever, heads lolling on one another's shoulders, as we rode home on the Long Island Rail Road. Yet Pink Floyd was at odds with the musical tastes I'd cultivated, those more along punk lines, and requiring Talking Heads- or Elvis Costello-style ironies to deflate the sort of hippie pieties that thrived, unmistakably, beneath Pink Floyd's wounded rage.

Such self-conscious posturing (my own, I mean, not Elvis Costello's) doesn't stand a chance against the kind of helpless love I still feel if I play "Shine On You Crazy Diamond, Parts 1-5," especially on headphones. This was a group that had lost its genius and its spiritual center, and had had to carry on. And, paradoxically, its masterpiece (for that was what I believed "Shine On You Crazy Diamond" to be) had been achieved without his help, but in his honor. Syd Barrett wasn't dead, but "Shine On You Crazy Diamond" *was* memorial art. It suggested that I didn't have to fall into ruin to exemplify the cost of losing someone as enormous as Judith Lethem. My surviving Judith's death would in no way be to her dishonor. I'd only owe her a great song.

SAUVE QUI PEUT (LA VIE)

(1980, Mom dead.)

My father's sometime girlfriend Hannah and I went out to see the new Godard movie, "Sauve Qui Peut (la Vie)," or "Every Man for Himself," at the Quad Cinema, on an evening when my father was out with another woman. The film had been widely reviewed as a return to form for Godard, who for most of the seventies had renounced the poetry of his sixties style in favor of Marxist agitprop (or, anyway, that was the received opinion). I'd been watching his sixties films at repertory houses, and loved the ones I (partly) understood: "Breathless," "My Life to Live," "A Woman Is a Woman," "Band of Outsiders," "Weekend." This would be the first time I'd seen a new Godard film at the moment of its release. Hannah was a young painter, sharp and funny, as near my age as my father's. I treasured my friendship with her, even at a time when my anger at my father for surviving my mother was at its very worst, and my treatment of him consisted largely of sullen avoidance.

I didn't understand "Sauve Qui Peut (la Vie)." I only recall an undertone of political and sexual disappointment that was beyond me. No major shame in that, as Godard can mystify plenty of adults. I did sense the film's beauty, the beauty of a pure cinematic voice that, even in its pensiveness, evoked grand, unnameable emotions. At fifteen, though, I wasn't at a point where I could trust art that baffled and enraptured me. I needed to feel that I'd encompassed it. Perhaps if I'd gone to the movie alone I'd have kidded myself, but in Hannah's company the incompleteness of my response was exposed to me.

We returned to my family's home, an odd move, given the situation. There we smoked pot together at the kitchen table, a provocation (by both of us) to my absent father, but also an invocation (by me) of my dead mother. It dawned on me that I was being used, a little. Hannah was staking out my dad, seeing if he came home alone, or at all. But that was O.K., because I was using Hannah to taunt my father, whether he knew it or not. I wanted to feel that I was out on a date with Hannah. The flaw in my game became clear soon enough. As I tired, Hannah grew angry, and my insufficiency as a surrogate became annoying to us both. I wasn't interested enough in this drama, because it wasn't about me, so I went to bed.

Something was quietly wrecked. Hannah generously treated me as an equal, so it wasn't her fault that the evening had stripped away part of my disguise, in terms both of Godard and of my father. I'd have to go farther from home for my companions; that was the lesson. And "Sauve Qui Peut (la Vie)" became a farewell to Jean-Luc Godard as one of my primary tokens of identification. He'd betrayed me by belonging more to the adults in the full auditorium at the Quad than he had to me as a teen-ager sitting in mostly empty repertory houses, alone.

THE SORCERER'S APPRENTICE

(1978–86, Mom dead.)

In the years following my mother's death, when I was fourteen, then fifteen, then sixteen, I forged a series of friendships with grown men, all of them teachers or artists or bohemians or seekers of one kind or another. There was Michael. There was Paul, a Quaker/hippie/Army dropout, whose book of poetry I illustrated. There was Ian, my math teacher in high school, with whom I'd stalk the streets of Greenwich Village after school, engaged in deep talk of existentialist resistance to bourgeois life. More briefly, there was Mr. Newman, a refined young painter frustrated at being trapped teaching English in a high school for aspiring painters; Rolando, a gay black painter and ballet dancer, who gave me a glimpse of New York's homosexual demimonde while leaving me untouched; Mr. Greenberg, my sensitive, bearish sculpture teacher, for whose pleasure I momentarily became a prodigy at marble-carving; Steve, a British hippie and world-traveller-by-bicycle, for a time a boyfriend of my mother's, with whom I would stay up all night inflamed by mystical, Gurdjieffian dialogues.

There may even have been others, but it would be a mistake to class any others with these principal three: Michael, Paul, and Ian—call them the beards. Each wore a beard, like my father. And it was their beards that made it unmistakable (to my eye) that my friendships were with adults, and so I must therefore be an adult myself, just as it was their beards and my lack of one that must have made it unmistakable (to other eyes) that a kid was hanging out with a grownup.

With each of the three I talked about books and movies of the outsider variety, smoked pot, complained about the dullness of school and the limited perspective of my peers, and escaped the role of teen-ager in a house wracked by my mother's death. To each of them, I suppose, I delivered the flattery of my reverence, nicely hidden inside the outlines of genuine friendship. Not one of these three (nor any of the others) ever hinted at anything paternal in his feeling for me. I would have rejected it irritably, and, anyway, they weren't the type.

For those outward similarities, the flavor of a day in the company of each of these three was violently dissimilar. Michael cultivated a misanthropic air, but drew people to him more compulsively than anyone I've yet known. In his world, parties were always breaking out. That Michael adored people as much as books helped keep me from making too firm a choice between the two, even as he became my idol as a reader and collector. Time spent with Paul was a little more hermetic and spooky. We'd get hold of the keys to the Quaker Cemetery, in Prospect Park, and creep around and take drugs inside the grounds. Paul's taste, in his reading and his own writing, was for exoticism, secret knowledge. He measured not only literature but also drugs and sex for their value as doors to higher realms. I savored Paul's frank talk of experiences he'd had and I hadn't, and tuned out what stumped me. As for Ian, his wild-man math classes were a legend at our high school—he'd drop the lesson and glower, or inform us we were fools to think doing well in math class meant anything in the larger scheme—but I was the kid who followed him home. Ian, talented at whatever he touched, had enthusiasms that fell on him like illnesses. He'd spend a month or two writing sonnets or mastering the newest theories in particle physics, disdaining as futile what he accomplished—it seemed to me—effortlessly. I couldn't keep up, but I found my place as sidekick and sounding board for both fevers of inspiration and rages of rejection.

Why should a kid who has lost his mother seem to be in search of a replacement father instead? Michael, Paul, and Ian weren't offering me sympathy, at least not a brand of it that cast me as the bereft child I partly was but didn't wish in any way to be. A grown woman might threaten to do that. A few of my father's girlfriends had, in fact (not Hannah, but others). If Michael, Paul, and Ian had one thing in common, it was their apparent disinterest in home or hearth. Their values reinforced my notions of a happy bohemian solitude, in which entanglements with women were a siren song of distraction.

This wasn't who I really was, or am now. But, at that moment, forgetting my mother seemed to entail forgetting my father, forgetting childhood (I became weirdly blind to the existence of my younger siblings, whose sadness would have mirrored mine back to me), and possibly even forgetting women per se. I threw out most of human life in favor of a handful of unconventional men of the kind I felt I needed to be.

My identification with the figure of the artist was total, yet I couldn't make safe use of the primary totem available to me: my own father. I had to define my distance from Richard Lethem, not only for the usual reasons but because he was a parent and I refused to be a child. Or perhaps those are the usual reasons, amplified to a scream.

FEAR OF MUSIC

(1970–present, Mom well/sick/dead.)

I read all the Narnia books. I read "The Lord of the Rings." I read every book by Ray Bradbury. I read every book by Raymond Chandler. I reread every book by Raymond Chandler. I read every book by Kurt Vonnegut, including "God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater." I read every book by Richard Brautigan, then Norman Mailer. I kept a complete set of the stories of Guy de Maupassant on the edge of my loft bed, and tried to read one a night until I finished it (I failed). I saw every movie by Stanley Kubrick, except "Killer's Kiss." (Later, when I ran the film society at college, I arranged a screening of "Killer's Kiss" there.) I tried, hopelessly, to see every movie by Jean-Luc Godard and François Truffaut, sitting alone at afternoon showings of "Jules and Jim" and "Tout Va Bien" and "The Bride Wore Black" in the repertory houses of Manhattan. I watched "Star Wars" twenty-one times in a single summer, largely alone. I sat alone at the Thalia, on West Ninety-fifth Street, and watched "2001: A Space Odyssey" three times in one day. Philip K. Dick became my favorite writer, and, spellbound by forty-odd titles listed in the front of a Bantam edition of "Ubik," I swore to find and read them all, and succeeded. When I was twenty-five, I had a miniaturized version of the dust-jacket design of the first edition of "Ubik" tattooed on my left arm. Italo Calvino became my favorite author, and I read every book by Italo Calvino. Don DeLillo, same thing. Patricia Highsmith, same thing. Thomas Berger, same thing.

I played the third album by Talking Heads, called "Fear of Music," to the point of destroying the vinyl, then replaced it with a new copy. I memorized the lyrics, memorized the lyrics to other Talking Heads albums, saw Talking Heads play any chance I got, and, when I arrived at college, put up a sign in the wing of my dormitory with an arrow pointing down the hall, where some Grateful Dead fans lived, which read, "Dead Heads"; another arrow, pointing in the direction of the room I shared with my simpatico roommate, read, "Talking Heads." At its peak, in 1980 or 1981, my identification was so complete that I might have wished to wear the album "Fear of Music" in place of my head in order to be more clearly seen by those around me.

I turned John Ford's "The Searchers" into a ritual and a cause. I bought approximately two hundred Bob Dylan bootlegs. I tried to see every Howard Hawks movie, every Orson Welles movie, every film listed in the "Film Noir Encyclopedia." For years, I calibrated my record collection against the grades in Robert Christgau's "Record Guide: Rock Albums of the '70s," jotting dissenting views in pencil in the margins: Marvin Gaye's "Here, My Dear," given a B-minus by Christgau, got an A-plus from me. "Here, My Dear," a tormented account of Gaye's divorce, was a record I was introduced to by someone who thought it was only pathetic and funny—I began defending it from scorn before I'd finished listening to the first side. I regularly fell asleep to a cassette of "Here, My Dear" on Walkman headphones for a few years in college. In my late twenties, I lulled myself asleep to Chet Baker records for a while, and at the peak of my Chet Baker obsession I owned more than fifty Chet Baker CDs, though I was never satisfied, because I knew someone who had more than a hundred Chet Baker CDs.

I rarely listen to Chet Baker anymore. I haven't read Vonnegut or Bradbury or Brautigan since I was a child, partly because I'm afraid of what I'll find, partly because they're in my DNA, and have become inscribed on the inner surface of the eyes through which I read others. I've rarely read Don DeLillo since the binge years, when I feverishly read and reread every one of his novels, and now, when I do, I find myself stirred but confused. The moment Don DeLillo became in any way fallible to me, I experienced a rupture I'm still traumatized by, one that colors my ability to situate him reasonably in my internal landscape of "contemporary letters"—he's either as great as I thought he was when I thought he made all other writing look silly or he's a total disaster. I still think "Barry Lyndon" and "2001: A Space Odyssey" are great films, but my notion of Kubrick-as-favorite-director became bewildering after I allowed myself to feel disappointment in "A Clockwork Orange," "Lolita," and "Full Metal Jacket." Impossible to place in relation to my "grownup" pantheon of favorites, like Kurosawa, Ford, or Cassavetes, Kubrick floats unfixed in my sky, mooning my awestruck teenage projections back at me.

I couldn't bear to listen to Talking Heads records, even the ones I'd previously revered, after "Naked," and after David Byrne's early solo records. That subsequent music seemed to my fierce acolyte's heart a betrayal of the idea of Talking Heads, as though David Byrne were an unworthy steward of the art he'd partly created. All their music became poisonously embarrassing to me the moment I realized it wasn't as good as I'd claimed it was (and no band is as good as I'd claimed Talking Heads were in the years I adored them). I suffered other similar, if milder, divorces: from the surrealist painters Magritte and De Chirico, from Jean-Luc Godard, from Brian Eno and David Bowie. These lesser disappointments I managed to modulate; the artists are less like ex-lovers than like friends I keep in my address book but call less often than I used to. It was my splits from Talking Heads and Stanley Kubrick and Don DeLillo that left me as indignant, ashamed, and unmoored as breakups with a girlfriend or wife, wondering who'd failed whom.

Attempting to burrow and disappear into the admiration of certain works of art, I tried to make such deep and pure identification that my integrity as a human self would become optional, a vestige of my relationship to the art. I wanted to submit and submerge, even to die a little. I developed a preference, among others, for art that required endurance, that mimicked a galactic endlessness and wore out the nonbelievers. By ignoring my hunger or my need to use the bathroom during a three-hour movie by Kubrick or Tarkovsky, I'd voted against my body, with its undeniable pangs and griefs, in favor of a self composed of eyeballs and brain, floating in the void of pure art. If I wasn't afraid of this kind of dissolution, I shouldn't be afraid of death, so I'd be an evolutionary step ahead.

By trying to export myself into a place that didn't fully exist, I was asking works of art to bear my expectation that they could be better than life, that they could redeem life. I asked too much of them: I asked them also to be both safer than life and fuller, a better family. That, they couldn't be. At the depths I'd plumb them, so many perfectly sufficient works of art became thin, anemic. I sucked the juice out of what I loved until I found myself in a desert, sucking rocks for water.

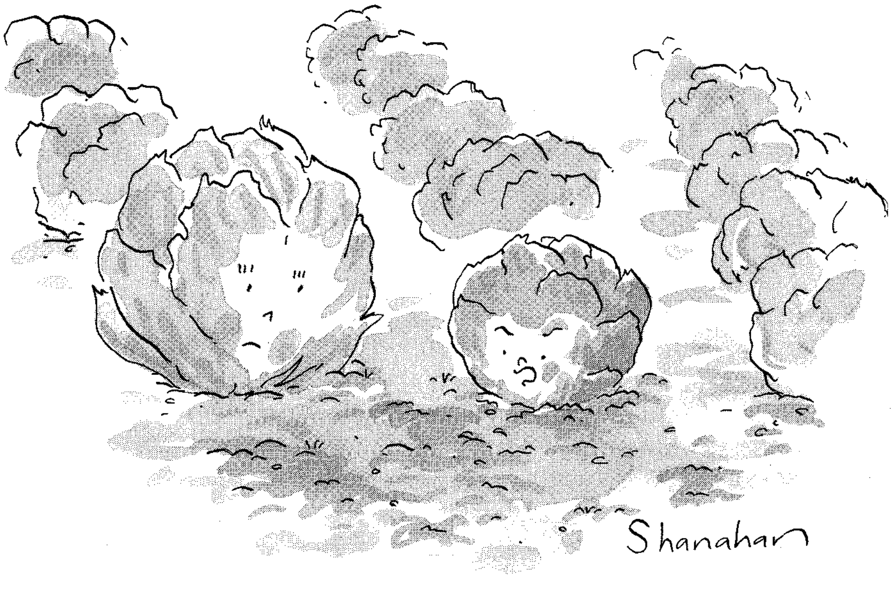
This was especially true of anything that assumed a posture of minimalism or perfectionism, or of chilly, intellectual grandeur. Hence my rage at Stanley Kubrick, Don DeLillo, Jean-Luc Godard, and Talking Heads. The artists who seemed to promise the most were the ones who'd created art that stirred me while seeming to absent themselves from emotional risk—so these were the ones that were capable of failing my needs most violently. It was as though in their coolness these artists had sensed my oversized needs and turned away, flinching from what I'd asked them to feel on my behalf. I blamed them, anyway. My declaring a writer or musician or director my favorite, it seemed, contained a kind of suicide pact for my own enthusiasm. The disappointment artist was me.

SLOW TRAIN COMING

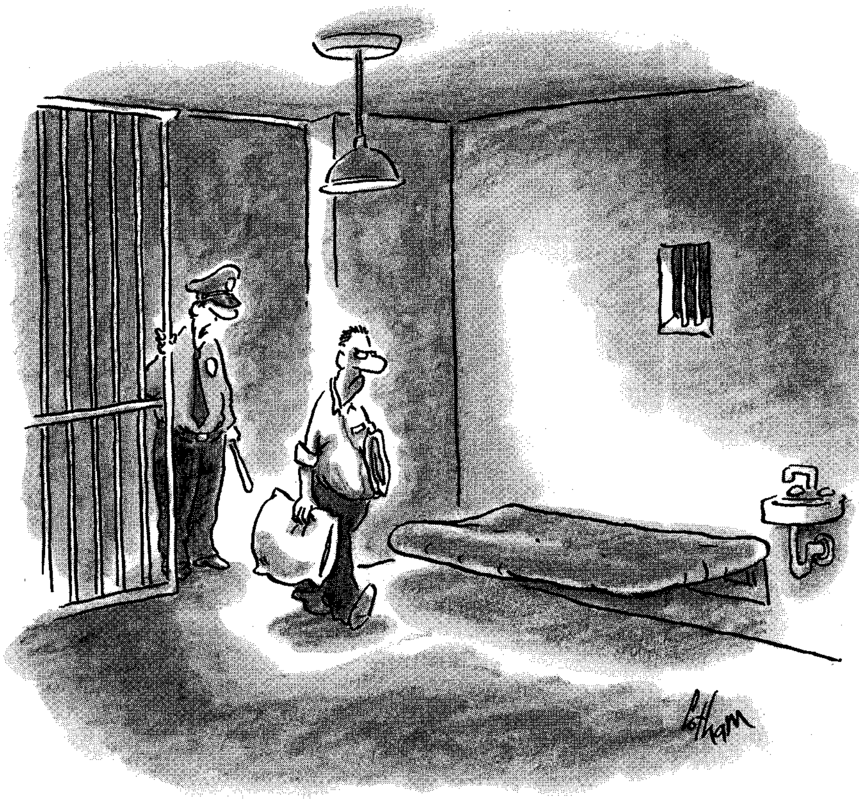
(1979–81, Mom dead.)

Bob Dylan belonged to my parents, specifically to my mother, who had even known him very slightly in her days on the folk scene. He was as obvious and omnipresent in our house as the Beatles, but, for a child, nowhere near as alluring. Dylan's songs spoke to me without my paying attention, until my mother's death forced me to parse her record collection for her traces. Then he became crucial in a series of ceremonies that extended also to Nina Simone, Cream, and Carly Simon.

In the same year, I befriended Michael, who loved Dylan in the manner that he loved his favorite writers, with the same ready disdain for anyone who didn't get it. This was 1979, when Dylan was seen by most liberals to be in dishonor for his born-again Christianity, another sixties illusion smashed. Anyway, for teenagers Dylan was a part of what punk had supposedly swept away. So, listening to Dylan became a token of the perversity of my tastes, like wearing jodhpurs to school in order to be branded eccentric. I championed him ironically to my peers,



"Compost? I say it's manure, and I say the hell with it."



"If the crime rate goes up, we'll know it wasn't you."

who would shake their heads. In this way, I brandished Dylan as a fetish until I could safely love him honestly.

Philip K. Dick was even more of a stealth operator. I liked science fiction, but the science fiction I'd located up to that point wasn't hip or funny or dark enough for my tastes. Dick's profile as King of the Paranoids, which is how I understood it from the jackets of his books, suited me so well that he was almost my official favorite writer before I'd finished a single book. Yet he was no Eno or Kubrick, no David Byrne. Dick's work had a yearning and homely undertow, a self-doubting quality, that made him infinitely richer and more disturbing than I'd assumed. Franz Kafka, another idol who survived my teen-age years, was like Dick in concealing personal art within a Trojan horse of paradox and paranoia. As with Dick, I came for the dystopian world view, and stayed for the self-disclosure.

Oddly enough, at that very moment, at the start of the eighties, Philip K. Dick was also publicly converting to what appeared to be some creepy version of Christianity. His spiritual desires, like Dylan's, on the one hand repulsed me. Yet in both cases the work that resulted from their religious questioning embedded such elegant uncertainty about the likelihood of a life's full sustenance in art and ego that my own solipsism was slightly eroded.

I'd backed into each of these loves against my teen-age tendencies in hero selection. Rather than being figures of authority, these guys were like fraternal companions, stumbling through their own ups and downs. Dylan and Dick created bodies of work so contradictory and erratic that they never seemed to have promised me perfection, so they could never disappoint me. Here were artists who hung themselves emotionally out to dry, who risked rage and self-pity in their work, and were sometimes overwhelmed by those feelings and blew it.

Bob Dylan and Philip K. Dick (and, eventually, others who resembled them in this way) also led me back to my father. For he was, of course, the artist from whose imperfections, and revealed vulnerabilities, I'd originally flinched. For years, I'd chosen against my father by idolizing artists who hid their face behind glossy, impassive surfaces. Yet those figures had proved brittle—inadequate against the untidy barrage of my feelings. They'd refused to meet me where I needed them most, at some emotional substratum down to which I'd excavated and found nobody home. Dylan and Dick, by their own unwillingness to hide their clumsiness and variability, to protect me from an awareness of the fallible processes behind even their masterpieces, seduced me into sympathy for the artist whose process was, as I grew up, so particularly naked to me. And, needless to say, I had to begin to forgive my father for being human before I could begin to write.

MR. NATURAL

(1978–86, Mom dead.)

In "Broadway Danny Rose," Woody Allen plays a theatrical agent whose star performer, a married singer, is carrying on an affair. In order to protect the singer, Allen escorts the girlfriend around town, allowing them to be mistaken for a couple in order to provide his client with deniability. When this leads to disaster, and threats of death (the girlfriend is a mafioso's ex-moll), Allen begs off. "I'm the beard," he says. "I'm only the beard!"

Allen's use gave new currency to this vivid term, often used to describe the heterosexual escort of a secretly gay movie star: the beard. A cloak on passions that those who required a beard might be unwilling to discuss or even consider, the beard was itself a figure of power and mystery. For we are revealed not only as our disguises slip or are abandoned but in the nature of the disguises we choose. Pretenses are always insufficient, overcompensatory, or both. Masks melt into our faces and become impossible to remove precisely at the instant we realized they were transparent all along.

More generally, my obsessiveness about books, songs, and films was a beard on growing up, which I didn't want to catch myself doing. I wanted it behind me even as it was ahead of me. This exertion of will—if I'd seen more Godard films than any adult I knew, or read more books by Norman Mailer, then maybe I'd have proved something, even if I didn't understand them—was also an act of sensory deprivation, of self-abnegation. The two—will and deprivation—were weirdly compatible. I tried to obliterate my teen-age years in movie theatres because my teen-age years both embarrassed and saddened me. Between double features of French films, between putting down one book and picking up the next, I'd glance at my wristwatch to see if I was in my twenties yet.

IN MY ROOM

(1974–present, Mom, etc.)

Every room I've lived in since I was given my own room, at eleven, has been lined with books. My employment in bookstores was, and is, continuous with my private hours: shelving and alphabetizing, building shelves, and browsing—in my own collection and others—in order to understand a small amount about the widest possible number of books. Such numbers of books are so constantly acquired that constant culling is necessary; if I slouch in this discipline, the books erupt. I've also bricked myself in with music—first vinyl records, then compact disks. My homes have been improbably information-dense, like capsules for survival of nuclear war, or models of the interior of my own skull. That comparison—room as brain—is one I've often reached for in describing the rooms of others, but it began with the suspicion that I'd externalized my own brain, for anyone who cared to look.

The simpler, and perhaps deeper, truth lies in the comparison more obvious to others: that the empires of data storage make up a castle or armor or hermit-crab's shell for my tender self. My exoskeleton of books has peaked in baroque outcroppings and disorderly excess at times of lonely crisis. After my mother died, I acquired a friend's vast paperback collection, and the overflow shelving in my room consisted of books balanced on planks unfixed to any wall or support, so that no one apart from me dared lift a book for fear of calamity. Between marriages, I've reached such fevers of acquisition that I twice resorted to sleeping on mattresses laid not atop a box spring but on a pallet of cartons, the only way to disguise the excess without resorting to storage. Moving the books off-site would have been tantamount to putting my arms and legs in hock.

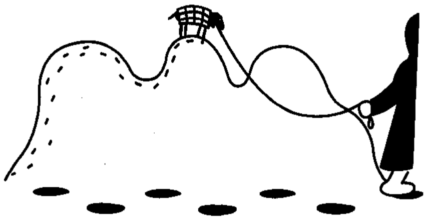
The work I've chosen bears a suspicious resemblance to the rooms themselves. My prose is a magpie's. Perhaps anyone's writing is ultimately bricolage, a welter of borrowings. But, of the writers I know, I've been the most eager to point out my influences, to spoil the illusion of originality by elucidating my fiction's resemblance to my book collection. I want it both ways, of course. At fifteen, I wished to be like Michael, who drew admirers into a bookstore that he seemed to be exhibiting almost grudgingly, as a private museum of his interests. My rooms might have been armor, a disguise or beard, but I wanted millions of admirers to peek inside and see me there, and when they did I wished for them to revere and pity me at once. The contradiction in this wish tormented me, so I ignored it. Then I became a writer and it began to sustain me.

THE COLLECTED WORKS OF JUDITH LETHEM

(1978–present, blah-blah-blah.)

My mother, because of her verbal brilliance, and her passion for books, was taken by her friends as a writer-to-be. She sometimes spoke of writing, but I doubt that she ever tried. A mother at the age of twenty, and a mother of three by the time she began to die, at the age of thirty-two, she never had much chance. It is impossible to know whether she would have made anything of the chance if she had.

Her gift to me on my fourteenth birthday, the last while she was alive, was a manual typewriter. The summer after her death, when I was fifteen, I wrote a hundred-and-twenty-five-page "novel" with the typewriter, mostly on torn-out blue-lined notebook paper. In that same year, I typed poems, of a fragmentary and impulsive sort. In truth, they more resembled song lyrics, since I wasn't a reader of poems then. I recall one that spoke of my mother and the possibility of her writing. "You can't write when you're sick in bed" was its much repeated chorus; I don't remember more. This poem was, on the one hand, sympathetic. I knew, at least consciously, that my mother's illness was involuntary. So I offered forgiveness: she couldn't be blamed for not having written. Yet it was also an admonitory poem—admonitory to myself.



Since then, I believe it would be fair to say, I've been in a hurry. Writing is another meditation that's also a frantic compensation. As if wearing headphones, I'm putting some of myself to sleep, rushing to the end of my days: there's a death wish in reducing life to watching one's fingers twitch on the alphabet. I'm as pathetic as that kid watching double features alone, but also as vain. Writing's an aggression on the world of books, one reader's bullying attempt to make himself known to others like him. My heroes Greene, Dick, and Highsmith left many dozens of novels; I'm on pace to write, at best, ten or twelve of the things. Still, I'm building my shelf. Like the comedian Steven Wright, who said, "I have a large seashell collection, which I keep scattered on beaches around the world," my teen-age room is still expanding, like the universe itself. If writing's a beard on loss, then, like some character drawn by Dr. Seuss, I live in my own beard.

Really, what's one supposed to say when the mask comes off? Is there an etiquette I'm breaking with? John Lennon recorded a song, for his first album after the breakup of the Beatles (what a grand beard that was, art and companionship blended together, and the worshipping world at his feet!), called "My Mummy's Dead." I suppose this is my version of that song. I sing it now in order to quit singing it. Mine has been a paltry beard, anyway, the peach-fuzzy kind a fifteen-year-old grows, so you still see the childish face beneath. Each of my novels, antic as they sometimes are, is fuelled by loss. I find myself speaking about my mother's death everywhere I go in this world.

Someone once said that every good poem's true subject is death, yet to write more than one poem you'd better find a way to forget you heard that. If life itself is, after all, only a beard for death, why couldn't the reverse be true as well? ♦

FICTION

THE CONDUCTOR

BY ALEKSANDAR HEMON

In the 1989 "Anthology of Contemporary Bosnian Poetry," Muhamed D. was represented with four poems. My copy of the anthology disappeared during the war, and I can't recall the titles of the poems, but I do remember the subjects: one of them had all the minarets of Sarajevo lighting up simultaneously at sunset on a Ramadan day; another showed the deaf Beethoven conducting his Ninth Symphony, unaware of the audience's ovations until the contralto touched his shoulder and turned him around. I was in my mid-twenties when the book came out, and compulsively writing poetry every day. I bought the anthology to see where I would fit into the pleiad of Bosnian poets. I found Muhamed D.'s poems silly and fake; his use of Beethoven struck me as pretentious and his mysticism alien to my own rock-and-roll affectations. But, in one of the few reviews the anthology received, the critic raved, in syntax tortured on the rack of platitudes, about the range of Muhamed D.'s poetic skills and the courage he had shown by shedding the primitive Bosnian tradition for more modern forms. "Not only is Muhamed D. the greatest living Bosnian poet," the reviewer said, "he is the only one who is truly alive."

I had not managed to get any of my poetry published—nor would I ever—but I considered myself to be a far better, more soulful poet than Muhamed D. I had written about a thousand poems in less than two years, and occasionally I shored those fragments into a book manuscript that I sent to various contests. I can confess—now that I've long since stopped writing poetry—that I never really understood what I wrote. I didn't know what my poems were about, but I believed in them. I liked their titles ("Peter Pan and the Lesbians," "Love and Obstacles," etc.), and I felt that they captured a realm of human innocence and experience that was unknowable, even by me. I delayed showing them to anyone else; I was waiting for readers to evolve, I suppose, to the point where they could grasp the vast spaces of my ego.

I met Muhamed D. for the first time in 1991, at a café called Dom Pisaca—Writers' Home—which was adjacent to the offices of the Writers' Association of Bosnia-Herzegovina. He was short and stocky, suddenly balding in his mid-forties, his expression frozen in an ugly permanent frown. I shook his hand limply, barely concealing my contempt. He spoke with the clear, provincial inflections of Travnik, his home town, and was misclad in a dun shirt, brown pants, and an inflammable-green tie. I was a cool-dressed city boy, all denim and T-shirts, born and bred in the purest concrete, skipping vowels and slurring my consonants in a way that cannot even be imitated by anyone who has not grown up inhaling Sarajevo smog. He offered me a seat at his table and I joined him, along with several of the other anthology veterans, all of whom wore the suffering faces of the sublime, as though they were forever imprisoned in the lofty dominion of poetry.

For some demented reason, Muhamed D. introduced me as an orchestra conductor. I tried to object, but the other poets started howling the "Ode to Joy" while making conducting gestures, and I was instantly nicknamed *Dirigent*—Conductor—thereby being safely and permanently marked as a non-poet. I stopped trying to correct the mistake as soon as I realized that it didn't matter: my role was simply to be an audience for their drunken, anthological greatness.

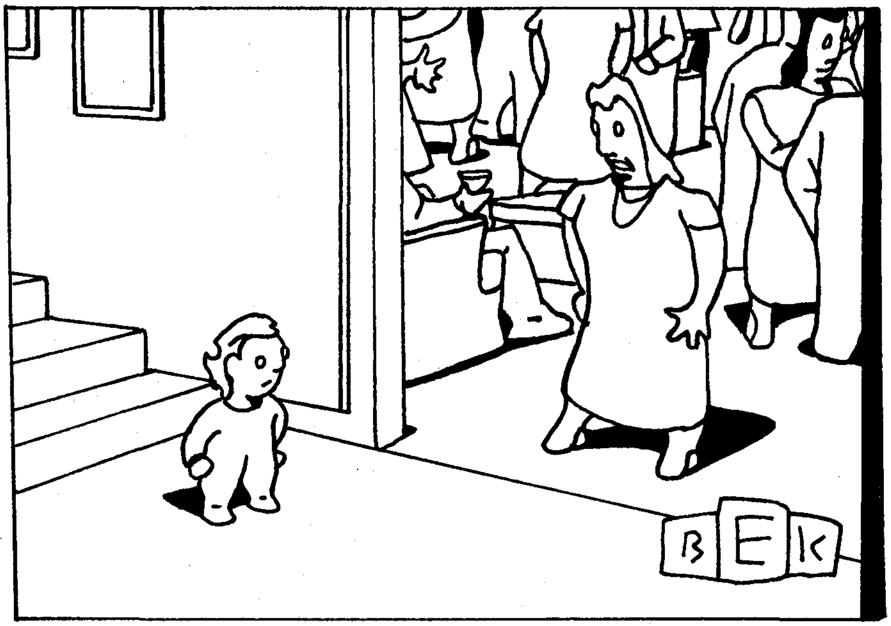
Muhamed D. sat at the head of "the Table," governing confidently as they babbled, ranted, sang heartbreaking songs, and went about their bohemian business, guzzling ambrosial beer. I occupied the corner chair, witnessing and waiting, dreaming up put-downs that I would never utter, building up my arrogance while craving their acceptance. Later that night, Muhamed D. demanded that I explain musical notation. "How do you read those dots and flags?" he asked. "And what do you really do with the stick?" I had no idea, but I tried to come up with some reasonable answer, if only to expose his ignorance. He just shook his head in disappointment. Almost every night I spent at the Table, there was a moment when I failed to enlighten the poets as to how music was written, thereby confirming their initial assumption that I was a lousy conductor, albeit a funny guy. I wondered how Muhamed D. could write a poem about Beethoven while being entirely oblivious of the way the damn notation system worked.

But the poets liked me, and I hoped that some of the pretty literature students who frequently served as their muses would like me, too. I particularly fancied three of them: Aida, Selma, and Ljilja, all of whom pouted their moist lips while pronouncing soft consonants and emitted an energy that caused instant erections. I kept trying to get at least one of them away from the Table, so that I could impress her with a recitation of "Peter Pan and the Lesbians." Not infrequently, I got sufficiently inebriated to find myself loudly singing a *sevdalinka*, sending significant glances toward the three muses, and emulating conducting moves for their amusement, while a brain-freezing vision of laying all three of them at once twinkled on my horizon. But it never happened: I couldn't sing, my conducting was ludicrous, I didn't recite any of my poems, I wasn't even published, and instead I had to listen to Muhamed D. singing his *sevdalinka* in a trembling voice that opened up the worlds of permanent dusk, where sorrow reigned and the mere sight of a woman's neck caused maddening bouts of desire. The eyes of the literature muses would fill with tears and he could pick whichever volunteer he chose to entertain him for the rest of the night.

I'd totter home alone, composing a poem that would show them all that Muhamed D. had nothing on me, a poem that would make Aida, Selma, and Ljilja regret never having let me touch them. I celebrated and sang myself on empty Sarajevo streets, and by the time I had unlocked the door and sneaked into my bed without waking up my poetry-free parents I would have created a masterpiece, so formidable and memorable that I wouldn't bother to write it down. The next morning, I would wake up with my skin oozing a sticky alcoholic sweat and the sappy masterpiece gone forever. Then I would embark upon a furious series of unrhymed, anarchic poems, ridiculing Muhamed D. and the Table and the muses in impenetrably coded words, while envisioning the devoted scholar who, after decades of exploring my notes and papers, would finally decipher the lines and recognize how tragically unappreciated I was. After writing all day, I'd head off to the Writers' Home and start the whole process again.

One night, Muhamed D. recited a new poem called "Sarajevo," about two

DETAIL: JEFFREY LADD, "MRKONIC GRAD" (2001)



"Mommy and Daddy and their friends are pretending they don't have horrible lives now."

• •

boys ("wisely chewing gum, / swallowing peppermint words") walking the streets with a soccer ball ("They throw the ball through the snow, across Mis Irbina Street / as if lobbing a hand grenade across the Lethe"). They accidentally drop the ball into the Miljacka River, and the ball floats downstream until it is caught in a whirlpool, from which they try to retrieve it, using a device I used once upon a time on my own lost ball: the boys string a crate on a rope that stretches from bank to bank, then manipulate the ends of the rope until the ball is caught. Muhamed D. watches them from a bridge:

> Whichever way I go, now, I'll reach the other shore.
> Old, I no longer know what they know:
> how to regain what is always lost. On the river surface
> snowflake after snowflake perishes.

He began his recitation in a susurrous voice, then rode a tide of iambic throttles and weighted caesuras up to thunderous orgasmic heights, from which he returned to a whisper and then ceased altogether, his head bowed, his eyes closed. He seemed to have fallen asleep. The Table was silent, the muses entranced. So I said, "Fuck! That's old. What are you now—a hundred?" Uncomfortable with the silence, doubtless as jealous as I was, the rest of the Table burst out laughing, slapping their knees. I sensed the solidarity in mocking Muhamed, and for the first time I thought I would be remembered for something other than conducting—I would be remembered for having made Muhamed old. He smiled at me benevolently, already forgiving. But that very night everybody at the Table started calling him Dedo—Old Man.

This took place just before the war, in the relatively rosy times when we were euphoric with the imminence of disaster—we drank and laughed and experimented with poetic forms into the late hours. We tried to keep the war away from the Table, but now and then a budding Serbian patriot would start ranting about the suppression of his people's culture, whereupon Dedo, with his newly acquired elder status, would indeed suppress him, with a sequence of carefully arranged insults and curses. Inevitably, the nationalist would declare Dedo an Islamo-fascist and storm off, never to return, while we, the fools, laughed uproariously. We knew—but we didn't want to know—what was going to happen, the sky descending upon our heads like the shadow of a falling piano in a cartoon.

Around that time, I found a way to come to the United States. In the weeks before I left, I roamed the city, haunting the territories of my past: here was the place where I had once stumbled and broken both of my index fingers; I was sitting on this bench when I first wedged my hand into Amela's tight brassiere; there was the kiosk where I had bought my first pack of cigarettes (Chesterfields); from that library I had checked out a copy of "Hamlet," never to read it or return it; on this bridge Dedo had stood, watching boys recover a ball, and one of those boys may have been me.

Finally, I selected, reluctantly, some of my poems to show to Dedo. I met him at the Table early one afternoon, before everyone else arrived. I gave him the poems, and he read them, while I smoked and watched slush splatter against the windows, then slide slowly down. "You should stick to conducting," he said eventually, and lit a cigarette. His eyebrows looked like hirsute little comets. The clarity of his gaze was what hurt me. These poems were told in the voice of postmodern Old Testament prophets; they were the cries of tormented individuals whose very souls were being depleted by the plague of relentless modernity. Was it possible, my poems asked, to maintain the reality of a person's self in this cruelly unreal world? The very inadequacy of poetry was a testimony to the disintegration of humanity, etc. But, of course, I explained none of that. I stared at Dedo with watery eyes, pleading for compassion, while he berated my sloppy prosody and my cold self-centeredness, which was exactly the opposite of soul. "A poet is one with everything," he said. "He is everywhere, so he is never alone." Everywhere, my ass—the tears dried in my eyes, and with an air of triumphant rationalism I tore my poetry out of his hands and left him in the dust of his neo-romantic ontology. But outside—outside I dumped those prophetic poems, the founding documents of my life, into a gaping garbage container. I never went back to the Table, I never wrote poetry again, and a few days later I left Sarajevo for good.

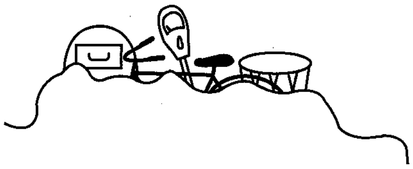
My story is boring: I was not in Sarajevo when the war began; I felt helplessness and guilt as I watched the destruction of my home town on TV; I lived in America. Dedo, of course, stayed for the siege—if you are the greatest living Bosnian poet, if you write a poem called "Sarajevo," then it is your duty to stay. I contemplated going back to Sarajevo early in the war, but realized that I was not, and never would be, needed there. So I struggled to make a living, while Dedo struggled to stay alive. For a long time, I didn't hear anything about him and, to tell the truth, I didn't really investigate—I had many other people to worry about, starting with myself. But then news of him began to reach me: he had signed a petition; he had written an open letter to the Pope; in front of an audience of annoyed Western diplomats he had recited Herbert's "Report from the Besieged City" ("Too old to carry arms and fight like the others— / they graciously gave me the inferior role of chronicler"). Once, I heard that he had been killed; a hasty paper even published an obituary. But it turned out that he'd only been wounded—he had come back from the other side of the Lethe with a bullet in his thigh—and he wrote a poem about it. The paper that had published the obituary published the poem, too. Predictably, it was called "Resurrection." In it, he walks the city as a ghost, but nobody remembers him. He says to the people he meets:

> Can't you recall me? I am the one
> Who carried upstairs your bloodied
> cannisters,
> Who slipped his slimy hand under the
> widow's skirt.
> Who wailed the songs of sorrow
> Who kept himself alive when you were
> willing to die.

Then he meets himself after the siege, "older than old," and he tells himself, alluding to Dante, "I did not know death hath undone so much." It was a soul-rending poem and I found myself hating him for it: he had written it practically on his deathbed with no apparent effort, as his thigh wound throbbed with pus. I tried to translate it, but neither my Bosnian nor my English was good enough.

And he kept writing like a maniac, as though his resurrected life were to be given over entirely to poetry. Poems, mimeographed on coarse paper, bound in frail booklets, were sent to me by long-unheard-from friends, carrying the smells (and microorganisms) of the many hands that had touched them on their way out of besieged Sarajevo. In the poems, there were, of course, images of death and destruction: a boy rolls the body of a sniper-shot man down the street, much like Sisyphus; a surgeon puts his wife's face back together after it has been blown apart by shrapnel, but a piece of her cheek is missing, exactly the spot where he liked to plant his good-night kiss; clusters of amputated limbs burn in a hospital oven, as the poet faces "the toy hell." But there were also poems that were different, and I cannot quite define the difference: a boy kicks a soccer ball up to the nape of his neck and balances it there; a young woman inhales cigarette smoke and holds it in as she smiles, everything stopping at that moment, "no tracing bullets lighting up the sky, / no pain in my riven thigh"; a foreign conductor hangs on a rope, like a deft spider, over his orchestra as it plays the "Eroica" in a burned-out building. I must confess that I believed for a moment that I was the conductor, that I remained part of Dedo's world, that something of me had stayed in Sarajevo.

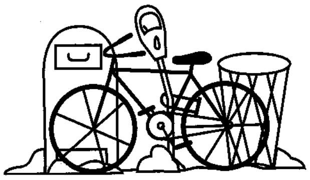
Still, living displaces false sentiments. I had to go on with my American life, busying myself with local survival, getting jobs, getting into graduate school, getting laid. Every once in a while, I unleashed the power of Dedo's words upon a sensitive American woman. The first one was Cheryl, the idle wife of a Barrington lawyer, whom I met at a Bosnian benefit dinner she was kind enough to organize. At least one Bosnian was required to benefit from her benefit dinner, so she'd tracked me down through a friend, an expert in disability studies, with whom I'd read a paper at a regional M.L.A. conference. Cheryl was generous beyond the dinner; before she went back to Barrington, I took her to my tiny studio—a monument to the struggles of immigrant life, with its sagging mattress, rotting shower curtain, and insomniac drummer next door. I recited Dedo's poems to her, pretending they were my own. She particularly liked the one about a lull in the shelling, during which a man goes for a walk with his rooster on a leash, "a soul fastened to a dying animal." Then I brushed the permed tresses from her forehead so that I could kiss it and slowly undressed her. Cheryl writhed in my embrace, kissed me with clammy passion, hoisted her hips, and moaned with pleasure, as though the intensity of her orgasm would directly succor the Bosnian resistance. I could not help thinking, in the end, that she was fucking Dedo, for it was his words that had seduced her. But I took what was given and then rolled off into the darkness of my actual life.



After the charitable Cheryl, I was somewhat ashamed, and for a while I couldn't stand to look at Dedo's poetry. I finished graduate school; I sold my stories; I was an author now. And somewhere along the way the war ended. On my book tour, I travelled around the country, reading to minuscule audiences, explaining Bosnia to a mixture of international-relations and South Slavic-languages students, simplifying the incomprehensible, and fretting all the time that an enraged reader would stand up and expose me as a fraud, as someone who had no talent—and therefore no right—to talk about the suffering of others. It never happened: I looked and conducted myself like a Bosnian, and everyone was content to believe that I was in constant, uninterrupted communication with the tormented soul of my homeland.

At one of those readings, I met Bill T., a professor of Slavic languages. He seemed to speak all of them, Bosnian included, and he was translating Dedo's latest book. With his red face, long, curly beard, and squat, sinewy body, Bill looked like a Viking. His ferocity was frightening to me, so I immediately flattered him by saying how immeasurably important it was to have Dedo's poetry translated into English. We went out drinking, and he drank like a true Viking, too, while detailing the saga of his adventures in Slavic lands: living with shepherds in the mountains of Macedonia; teaching English in Siberia; interviewing Solidarnosc veterans; recording Slovenian carnival songs. He had also spent some years, just for the hell of it, in Guatemala, Honduras, and Morocco. The man had been everywhere, had done everything, and the drunker I got the greater he was, and the more of nothing I had to say.

This was in Iowa City, I believe. I woke up the next morning on Bill T.'s sofa. My pants were laid out on the coffee table. Along the walls there were dusty stacks of books. In the light fixture above me I could see the silhouettes of dead flies. A ruddy-faced boy with a gossamer mustache sat on the floor next to the sofa and watched me with enormous eyes.



"What are you doing here?" the boy asked calmly.

"I don't really know," I said, and sat up, exposing my naked thighs. "Where is Bill?"

"He stepped out."

"Where is your mom?"

"She's busy at the moment."

"What is your name?"

"Ethan."

"Nice to meet you, Ethan."

"Likewise," Ethan said. Then he grabbed my pants and threw them at me.

It was while I was slouching down the linden-lined street, people nodding at me from sunny porches and healthy-looking squirrels racing up and down trees—it was then that the story Bill had told me about Dedo the night before fully hit me and I had to sit down on the curb to deal with it.

Dedo had come to Iowa, Bill said, to be in the International Writing Program for twelve weeks. Bill had arranged it all and volunteered to put Dedo up in the room above his garage. Dedo had arrived with a small duffelbag, emaciated and exhausted, with the English he'd picked up while translating Yeats and a gallon of Johnnie Walker he'd picked up in a duty-free shop. The first week, he locked himself in above the garage and drank without pause. Every day, Bill knocked on the door, imploring him to come out, to meet the dean and the faculty, to mingle. Dedo refused to open the door and eventually stopped responding altogether. Finally, Bill broke down the door, and the room was an unreal mess: the bed was inexplicably wet; there were monstrous, bloody footprints everywhere, because Dedo had apparently broken the Johnnie Walker bottle, then walked all over it. A box of cookies had been torn open and the cookies crushed. In the trash can, there were dozens of Podravka liver-pâté cans, cleaned out and then filled up with cigarette butts. Dedo was sleeping on the floor in the corner farthest from the window, facing the wall.

Bill and his wife subjected Dedo to repeated cold showers; they cleaned him up and aired out the room; they practically force-fed him. For another week, he wouldn't stick his nose out of the room. And then, Bill said, he began writing. He did not sleep for a week, delivering poems first thing in the morning, demanding translations by the afternoon. "American poets used to be like that," Bill said wistfully. "Now all they do is teach and complain and fuck their students on the sly."

Bill cancelled his classes and set out to translate Dedo's poems. It was like entering the eye of a storm every day. In one poem, Bill said, a bee lands on a sniper's hand, and he waits for it to sting him. In another one, Dedo sees an orange for the first time since the siege began, and he is not sure what is inside it—he wonders if oranges have changed during his time away from the world; when he finally peels it, the smell inhales him. In another, Dedo is running down Sniper Alley when a woman tells him that his shoe is untied, and with perfect clarity of purpose, with the ultimate respect for death, he stoops to tie it, and the shooting ceases, for even the killers appreciate an orderly world. "I could not believe," Bill said, "that such things could come out of that pandemonium."

At the end of the third week, Dedo gave a reading. With a mug of Johnnie Walker at hand, he barked and hissed his verses at the audience, waving a shaky finger. After Dedo had read, Bill came out and read the translations slowly and serenely in his deep Viking voice. But the audience was confused by Dedo's hostility. They clapped politely. Afterward, faculty and students came up to Dedo to ask him about Bosnia and invite him to luncheons. He visibly loathed them. He livened up only when he realized that he had a chance to lay one of the graduate students who was willing to open her mind to other cultures. He was gone the next week, straight back to the siege, sick of America after less than a month.

In the years after the war, only the occasional rumor reached me: Dedo had survived a massive heart attack; he'd made a deal with his physician that he would stop drinking but go on smoking; he'd released a book based on conversations with his young niece during the siege. And then—this made the news all over Bosnia—he'd married an American lawyer, who was in Bosnia to collect war-crimes evidence. The newspapers cooed over the international romance: Dedo had wooed her by singing and writing poetry; she had taken him to mass-grave sites. A photograph from their wedding showed her to be a foot taller than he, a handsome woman in her forties with a long face and short hair. He consequently produced a volume of poems entitled "The Anatomy of My Love," which featured many parts of his wife's remarkably healthy body. There were poems about her instep and her heel, her armpit and her breasts, the nape of her neck and the size of her eyes, the knobs on her knees and the ridges on her spine. Her name was Rachel. I heard that they'd come to the United States; in pursuit of her body, Dedo had ended up in Madison, Wisconsin.

I do not want to give the impression that I thought about him a lot or even often. The way you never forget a song from your childhood, the way you hear it in your mind's ear every once in a while—that's how I remembered him. He was well outside my life, a past horizon visible only when the sky of the present was particularly clear.

As it was on the cloudless morning of September 11, 2001, when I was on a plane to D.C. The flight attendant was virginally blond. The man sitting next to me had a ring of Biblical proportions on his pinkie. The woman on my right was immensely pregnant, squeezed into a tight red dress. I, of course, had no idea what was going on—the plane simply landed in Detroit and we disembarked. The Twin Towers were going down simultaneously on every screen at the unreal airport; maintenance personnel wept, leaning on their brooms; teen-age girls screamed into their cell phones; forlorn pilots sat at closed gates. I wandered around the airport, recalling the lines of one of Dedo's poems: "I will be alive, when everybody's dead. / But there will be no joy in that, for all those undone / by death need to pass through me, to get to hell."

While America settled into its mold of patriotic vulgarity, I began to despair, for everything reminded me of Bosnia in 1991. The war on terror took me to the verge of writing poetry again, but I knew better. Nevertheless, I kept having imaginary arguments with Dedo, alternately explaining to him why I *had to* write and why I *should not* write poetry, while he tried either to talk me out of it or to convince me that it was my duty. Then, last winter, I was invited to read in Madison and hesitantly accepted. Dedo was the reason for both the hesitation and the acceptance, for I was told that he would be the other reader.

So there I was, entering the large university auditorium. I recognized Dedo in the crowd by his conspicuous shortness, his bald dome reflecting the stage lights. He was changed: he'd lost weight; everything on him, from his limbs to his clothes, seemed older and more worn; he wiped his hands on his corduroy pants, nervously glancing up at the people around him. He was clearly dying to smoke, and I could tell that he was not drunk enough to enjoy the spotlight. He was so familiar to me, so related to everything I used to know: the view from my window; the bell of the dawn streetcar; the smell of smog in February.

"Dedo," I said. "*Šta ima?*"

He turned to me in a snap, as if I had just woken him up, and he did not smile. He didn't recognize me, of course. It was a painful moment, as the past was rendered both imaginary and false, as though I had never lived or loved. Even so, I introduced myself, told him how we used to drink together at the Writers' Home; how he used to sing beautifully; how often I had remembered those times. He still couldn't recall me. I proceeded with flattery: I had read everything he'd ever written; I admired him and, as a fellow-Bosnian, I was so proud of him—I had no doubt that a Nobel Prize was around the corner. He liked all that, and nodded along, but I still did not exist in his memory. I told him, finally, that he used to think I was a conductor. "*Dirigent!*" he exclaimed, smiling at last, and here I emerged into the light. He embraced me, awkwardly pressing his cheek against my chest. Before I could tell him that I had never conducted and still was not conducting, we were called up to the stage. He had a rotten-fruit smell, as if his flesh had fermented; he went up the stairs with a stoop. Onstage, I poured him a glass of ice water and, instead of a thanks, he said, "You know, I wrote a poem about you."

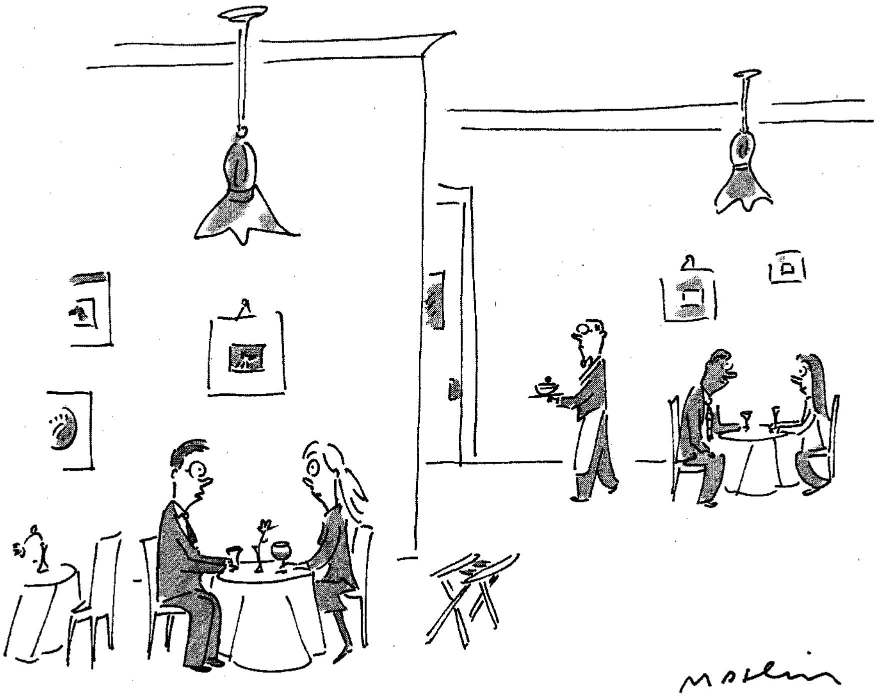
I do not like reading in front of an audience, because I am conscious of my accent and I keep imagining some American listener collecting my mispronunciations, giggling at my muddled sentences. I read carefully, slowly, avoiding dialogue, and I always read the same passage. Often, I do it like a robot—I just read without even thinking about it, my lips moving but my mind elsewhere. So it was this time: I felt Dedo's gaze on my back; I thought about his mistaken memories of me conducting a nonexistent orchestra; I wondered about the poem he had written about me. It could not have been the poem with the spider-conductor, for he surely knew that I was not in Sarajevo during the siege. Who was I in his poem? Did I force the musicians to go beyond themselves, to produce sublime beauty on their mistuned instruments? What were they playing? A Beethoven symphony? "The Rite of Spring"? "Death and Transfiguration"? I sure as hell was not conducting the Madison audience well. They applauded feebly, having all checked out after the first paragraph or so. "Super," Dedo said when I crawled back into my seat, and I could not tell whether he was being generous or whether he just had no idea how bad it really was.

Dedo was barely visible behind the lectern, bending the microphone downward like a horribly wilted flower. He announced that he was going to read a few poems that had been translated into English by his "angel wife." He started from a deep register, then his voice rose steadily until it boomed. His vowels were flat, no diphthongs audible; his consonants were hard, maximally consonanty; "the"s were "duh"s; no "r"s rolled. His accent was atrocious and I was happy to discover that his English was far worse than mine. But the bastard scorched through his verses, unfettered by self-consciousness. He flung his arms like a real conductor; he pointed his finger at the audience and he stomped his foot, leaning toward and away from the microphone, as two young black women in the first row followed the rhythm of his sway. Then he read as if to seduce them, whispering, slowly:

Nobody is old anymore—either dead or
 young.
Your wrinkles straighten up, the feet no
 longer flat.
Cowering behind garbage containers,
 flying away
from the snipers, everybody is a gorgeous
 body
stepping over the dead ones, knowing:
We are never as beautiful as now.

Later on, I bought him a series of drinks at a bar full of Badgers pennants and kids in college-sweatshirt uniforms, blaring TVs showing helmeted morons

"Thanks, Chuck, I admire your NASCARness also."



"I thought I was headed for a career in the healing arts. I never dreamed I'd become a henchman."

• •

colliding head on. We huddled in the corner, close to the toilets, and drank bourbon upon bourbon. We exchanged gossip about various people from Sarajevo: Sem was in D.C.; Goran was in Toronto; someone I knew but he could not remember was in New Zealand; someone I had never known was in South Africa. At a certain point he fell silent. I was the only one talking, and all the suppressed misery of living in America surged from me. Oh, how many times I had wished death to entire college football teams. It was impossible to meet a friend without making a fucking appointment weeks in advance, and there were no coffee gardens where you could sit and watch people walk by. I was sick of being asked where I was from and I hated Bush and his Jesus freaks. With every particle of my being I detested the word "carbs" and the systematic extermination of joy from American life, etc.

I don't know if he heard me at all. His head hung low and he could have been asleep, until he looked up and noticed a young woman with long blond hair passing on her way to the bathroom. He kept his gaze on her backpack, then on the bathroom door, as if waiting for her.

"Cute," I said.

"She is crying," Dedo said.

We went to another bar, drank more, and left after midnight. Drunk out of my mind, I slipped and sat in a snow pile. We laughed, choking, at the round stain that made it look as if I had soiled my pants. The air was scented with burned burgers and patchouli. My butt was cold. Dedo was drunk, too, but he walked better than I did, skillfully avoiding tumbles. I do not know why I agreed to go home with him to meet his wife. We wobbled down quiet streets, where the trees were lined up as if dancing a quadrille. He made me sing, and so I sang: *Put putuje Latif-aga / Sa jaranom Sulejmanom*. We passed a house as big as a castle, a Volvo stickered with someone else's thought, Christmas lights and plastic angels eerily aglow. "How the fuck did we get here?" I asked him. "Everywhere is here," he said. Suddenly he pulled a cell phone out of his pocket, as if by magic—he belonged to a time before cell phones. He was calling home to tell Rachel that we were coming, he said, so that she could get some food ready for us. Rachel did not answer, and he kept redialling.

We stumbled up the porch, past a dwarf figure and a snow-covered rocking chair. Before Dedo could find his keys, Rachel opened the door. She was a burly woman, with austere hair and eventful earrings, her chin tucked into her underchin. She glared at us and I have to say I was scared. As Dedo crossed the threshold, he professed his love to her in an accent so horrible that I thought for an instant he was kidding. The house smelled of chemical lavender; a drawing of a large-eyed mule hung on the wall. She kept saying nothing, her cheeks puckering with obvious fury. I was willing now to give my life for friendship—I might have abandoned him in Sarajevo, but here we would face Rachel together.

"This is my friend, *Dirigent*," he said, propping himself up on his toes to land a hapless kiss on her taut lips. "He is conductor." I made ridiculous conducting moves, as if to prove that I could still do it. She didn't even look at me; her eyes were pinned on Dedo.

"You're drunk," she said. "Again."

"Because I love you," he said.

I nodded.

"Excuse us," she said, and pulled him deeper into the house, while I stood in the hallway deliberating over whether or not to take off my shoes. A little ball of dust moved down the hall, away from the door, like a scared dog. I recalled Dedo's poem about the shoes he had bought the day before the siege began, and which he would never wear, "for they grow dirty on the streets filthy with death." Every day he polished those new shoes with what could have been his last breath, "hoping for blisters."

He emerged from the house depths and said, "*Daj pomozi*"—"Help me."

"Get the hell out, you drunken pig," Rachel snarled in his wake. "And take your stupid friend with you."

I decided not to take my shoes off and, stupidly, said, "It's O.K."

"It is not O.K.!" Rachel shouted. "It has never been O.K. It will never be O.K."

"You must be nice to him!" Dedo screamed at her. "You must respect."

"It's O.K.," I said.

"Not O.K. Never O.K. This is my friend." Dedo stabbed himself with his stubby finger. "Do you know me? Do you know who am I? I am biggest Bosnian poet alive."

"He is the greatest," I said.

"You're a fucking midget, is what you

are!" She leaned into him, and I could see his pointed-finger hand unfolding and swinging for a slap.

"Come on, midget!" Rachel bellowed. "Hit me. Hit me. Let's have Officer Johnson for coffee and cookies again."

Detergent-like snow had already covered our footprints. We stood outside on the street, Dedo fixated on the closed door, as though his gaze could burn through it, cursing in the most beautiful Bosnian and listing all her sins against him: her bastard son, her puritanism, her President, her decaf coffee. Panting, he bent over and grabbed a handful of snow, shaped it into a frail snowball, and threw it at the house. It disintegrated into a little blizzard and sprinkled the dwarf's face. He was about to make another wretched snowball when I spotted a pair of headlights creeping down the street. It looked like a police car, and I did not want to risk coffee and cookies with Officer Johnson, so I started running.

Dedo caught up to me around the corner, and we staggered down an alley, which was deserted except for a sofa with a stuffed giraffe leaning on it. There were weak tire-mark gullies and fresh traces of what appeared to be a three-legged rat. We saw a woman in the kitchen window of one of the houses. She was circling around something we could not see, a glass full of red wine in her hand. The snow was ankle deep; we watched her, mesmerized: a long, shiny braid stretched down her back. The three-legged rat must have vanished, for the prints just stopped in the middle of the alley. We, too, could go neither forward nor back, so we sat down right there. I felt the intense pleasure of giving up, the expansive freedom of utter defeat. *Whichever way I go, now, I'll reach the other shore.* Dedo was humming a Bosnian song I didn't recognize, snowflakes melting on his lips. It was clear to me that we could freeze to death in a Madison back alley—it would be a famous way to die. I wanted to ask Dedo about the poem he had written about me, but he said, "This is like Sarajevo in '93." Perhaps because of what he'd said, or perhaps because I thought I saw Officer Johnson's car passing the alley, I got up and helped Dedo to his feet.

We caught a cab with an Arab driver, who hated us. He was listening to a light-jazz station. Dedo tried to tell him, incoherently and unintelligibly, that he was a fellow-Muslim. Madison was deserted. It was only a question of time before someone vomited.

"You are my brother," Dedo said, and squeezed my hand. "I wrote a poem about you."

I tried to kiss his cheek, as the cabbie glared at us in the rearview mirror, but managed only to leave some saliva on his forehead.

"I wrote a good poem about you," Dedo said again, and I asked him to recite it for me.

Dedo dropped his chin to his chest. He seemed to have passed out, so I shook him and, like a talking doll, he said, "He whips butterflies with his baton." But then we arrived at my hotel. Dedo kept reciting as I paid for the cab, and I didn't catch a word.

I dragged him to the elevator, his knees buckling, the snow thawing on his coat, releasing a closet-and-naphthalene smell. I could not tell whether he was still reciting or simply mumbling and cursing. I dropped him to the floor in the elevator and he fell asleep. He sat there in a pile while I was unlocking the door to my room, and the elevator closed its doors and took him away. The thought of him being discovered in the elevator, drooling and gibbering, gave me momentary pleasure. But I pressed the call button, and the elevator carrying Dedo came obediently back. *We are never as beautiful as now.*

The crushing sadness of hotel rooms, the gelid lights and clean notepads, the blank walls and particles of someone else's erased life: I rolled him into this as if into Hell. I hoisted him up onto the bed, took off his shoes and his socks. His toes were frostbitten, his heels brandished a pair of blisters. I peeled off his coat and pants and he was shivering, his skin goose-bumped, his navel hidden in a tuft of hair. I wrapped the bedcovers around him and threw a blanket on top. Then I lay down next to him, smelling his sweat and infected gums. He grunted and murmured, until his face calmed, the eyelids smoothing out into slumber, the brows unfurrowing. A deep sigh, as when dusk falls, settled in his body. He was a beautiful human being.

And then on Tuesday, last Tuesday, he died. ♦

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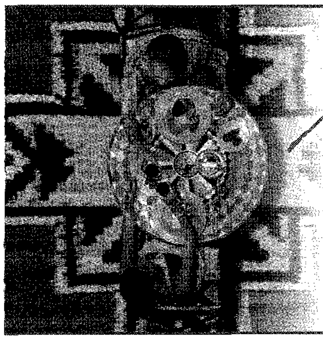

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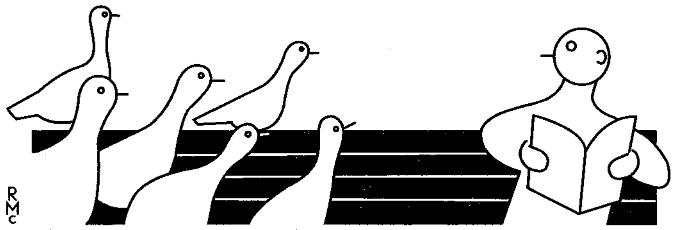


A CRITIC AT LARGE

TIME BANDITS

What were Einstein and Gödel talking about?

BY JIM HOLT

In 1933, with his great scientific discoveries behind him, Albert Einstein came to America. He spent the last twenty-two years of his life in Princeton, New Jersey, where he had been recruited as the star member of the Institute for Advanced Study. Einstein was reasonably content with his new milieu, taking its pretensions in stride. “Princeton is a wonderful piece of earth, and at the same time an exceedingly amusing ceremonial backwater of tiny spindle-shanked demigods,” he observed. His daily routine began with a leisurely walk from his house, at 115 Mercer Street, to his office at the institute. He was by then one of the most famous and, with his distinctive appearance—the whirl of pillow-combed hair, the baggy pants held up by suspenders—most recognizable people in the world.

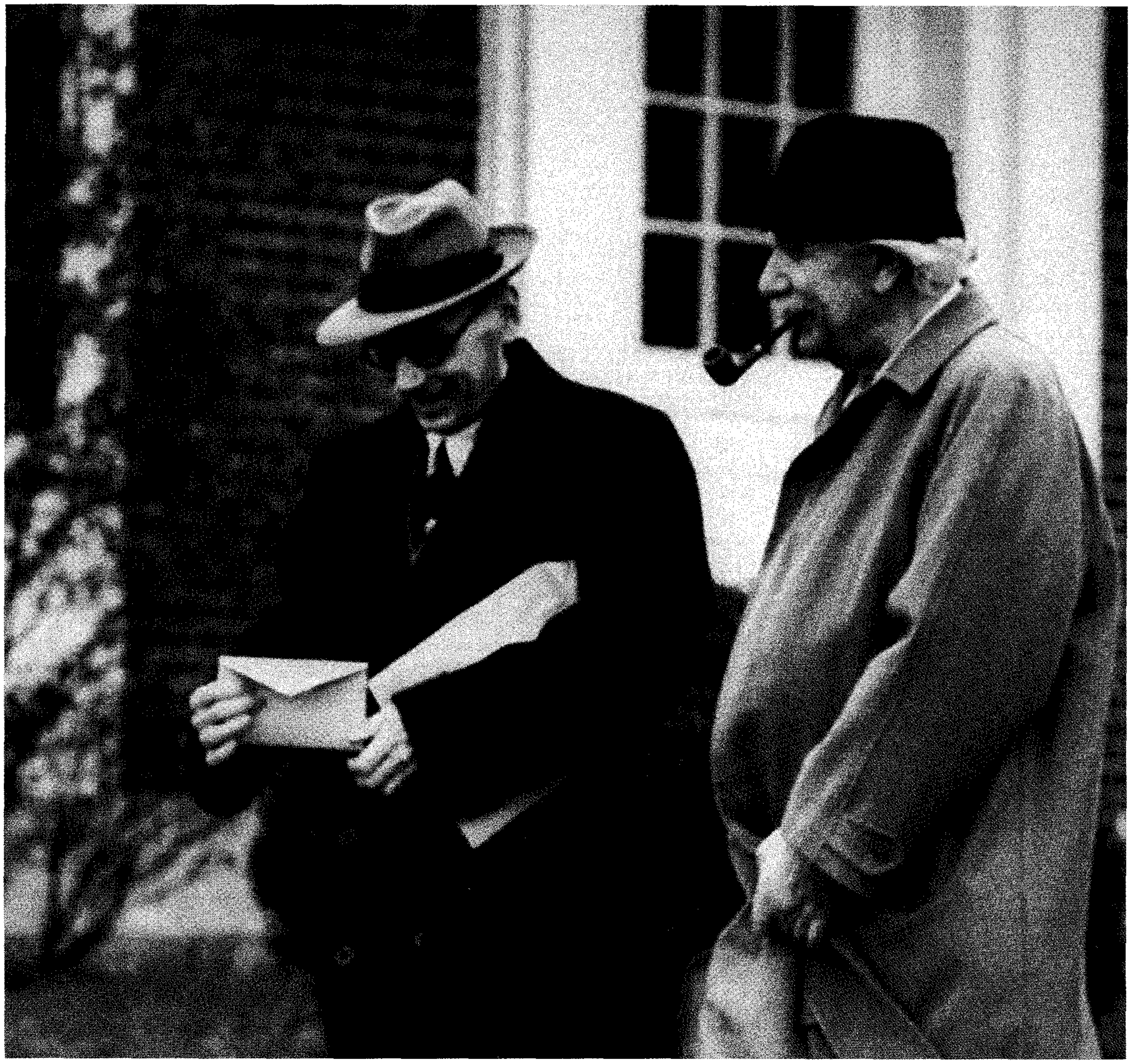
A decade after arriving in Princeton, Einstein acquired a walking companion, a much younger man who, next to the rumpled Einstein, cut a dapper figure in a white linen suit and matching fedora. The two would talk animatedly in German on their morning amble to the institute and again, later in the day, on their way homeward. The man in the suit may not have been recognized by many townspeople, but Einstein addressed him as a peer, someone who, like him, had single-handedly launched a conceptual revolution. If Einstein had upended our everyday notions about the physical world with his theory of relativity, the younger man, Kurt Gödel, had had a similarly subversive effect on our understanding of the abstract world of mathematics.

Gödel, who has often been called the greatest logician since Aristotle, was a strange and ultimately tragic man. Whereas Einstein was gregarious and full of laughter, Gödel was solemn, solitary, and pessimistic. Einstein, a passionate amateur violinist, loved Beethoven and Mozart. Gödel's taste ran in another direction: his favorite movie was Walt Disney's “Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs,” and when his wife put a pink flamingo in their front yard he pronounced it *furchtbar herzig*—“awfully charming.” Einstein freely indulged his appetite for heavy German cooking; Gödel subsisted on a valetudinarian's diet of butter, baby food, and laxatives. Although Einstein's private life was not without its complications, outwardly he was jolly and at home in the world. Gödel, by contrast, had a tendency toward paranoia. He believed in ghosts; he had a morbid dread of being poisoned by refrigerator gases; he refused to go out when certain distinguished mathematicians were in town, apparently out of concern that they might try to kill him. “Every chaos is a wrong appearance,” he insisted—the paranoiac's first axiom.

Although other members of the institute found the gloomy logician baffling and unapproachable, Einstein told people that he went to his office “just to have the privilege of walking home with Kurt Gödel.” Part of the reason, it seems, was that Gödel was undaunted by Einstein's reputation and did not hesitate to challenge his ideas. As another member of the institute, the physicist Freeman Dyson, observed, “Gödel was . . . the only one of our colleagues who walked and talked on equal terms with Einstein.” But if Einstein and Gödel seemed to exist on a higher plane than the rest of humanity, it was also true that they had become, in Einstein's words, “museum pieces.” Einstein never accepted the quantum theory of Niels Bohr and Werner Heisenberg. Gödel believed that mathematical abstractions were every bit as real as tables and chairs, a view that philosophers had come to regard as laughably naïve. Both Gödel and Einstein insisted that the world is independent of our minds, yet rationally organized and open to human understanding. United by a shared sense of intellectual isolation, they found solace in their companionship. “They didn't want to speak to anybody else,” another member of the institute said. “They only wanted to speak to each other.”

People wondered what they spoke about. Politics was presumably one theme. (Einstein, who supported Adlai Stevenson, was exasperated when Gödel chose to vote for Dwight Eisenhower in 1952.) Physics was no doubt another. Gödel was well versed in the subject; he shared Einstein's mistrust of the quantum theory, but he was also skeptical of the older physicist's ambition to supersede it with a “unified field theory” that would encompass all known forces in a deterministic framework. Both were attracted to problems that were, in Einstein's words, of “genuine importance,” problems pertaining to the most basic elements of reality. Gödel was especially preoccupied by the nature of time, which, he told a friend, was *the* philosophical question. How could such a “mysterious and seemingly self-contradictory” thing, he wondered, “form the basis of the world's and our own existence”? That was a matter in which Einstein had shown some expertise.

A century ago, in 1905, Einstein proved that time, as it had been understood by scientist and layman alike, was a fiction. And this was scarcely his only achievement that year, which John S. Rigden skillfully chronicles, month by month, in “Einstein 1905: The Standard of Greatness” (Harvard; $21.95). As it began, Einstein, twenty-five years old, was employed as an inspector in a patent office in Bern, Switzerland. Having earlier failed to get his doctorate in physics,



Einstein said he went to his office at the Institute for Advanced Study "just to have the privilege of walking home with Kurt Gödel."

LEONARD McCOMBE/GETTY IMAGES

he had temporarily given up on the idea of an academic career, telling a friend that "the whole comedy has become boring." He had recently read a book by Henri Poincaré, a French mathematician of enormous reputation, which identified three fundamental unsolved problems in science. The first concerned the "photoelectric effect": how did ultraviolet light knock electrons off the surface of a piece of metal? The second concerned "Brownian motion": why did pollen particles suspended in water move about in a random zigzag pattern? The third concerned the "luminiferous ether" that was supposed to fill all of space and serve as the medium through which light waves moved, the way sound waves move through air, or ocean waves through water: why had experiments failed to detect the earth's motion through this ether?

Each of these problems had the potential to reveal what Einstein held to be the underlying simplicity of nature. Working alone, apart from the scientific community, the unknown junior clerk rapidly managed to dispatch all three. His solutions were presented in four papers, written in the months of March, April, May, and June of 1905. In his March paper, on the photoelectric effect, he deduced that light came in discrete particles, which were later dubbed "photons." In his April and May papers, he established once and for all the reality of atoms, giving a theoretical estimate of their size and showing how their bumping around caused Brownian motion. In his June paper, on the ether problem, he unveiled his theory of relativity. Then, as a sort of encore, he published a three-page note in September containing the most famous equation of all time: $E = mc^2$.

All of these papers had a touch of magic about them, and upset deeply held convictions in the physics community. Yet, for scope and audacity, Einstein's June paper stood out. In thirty succinct pages, he completely rewrote the laws of physics, beginning with two stark principles. First, the laws of physics are absolute: the same laws must be valid for all observers. Second, the speed of light is absolute; it, too, is the same for all observers. The second principle, though less obvious, had the same sort of logic to recommend it. Since light is an electromagnetic wave (this had been known since the nineteenth century), its speed is fixed by the laws of electromagnetism; those laws ought to be the same for all observers; and therefore everyone should see light moving at the same speed, regardless of the frame of reference. Still, it was bold of Einstein to embrace the light principle, for its consequences seemed downright absurd.

Suppose—to make things vivid—that the speed of light is a hundred miles an hour. Now suppose I am standing by the side of the road and I see a light beam pass by at this speed. Then I see you chasing after it in a car at sixty miles an hour. To me, it appears that the light beam is outpacing you by forty miles an hour. But you, from inside your car, must see the beam escaping you at a hundred miles an hour, just as you would if you were standing still: that is what the light principle demands. What if you gun your engine and speed up to ninety-nine miles an hour? Now I see the beam of light outpacing you by just one mile an hour. Yet to you, inside the car, the beam is still racing ahead at a hundred miles an hour, despite your increased speed. How can this be? Speed, of course, equals distance divided by time. Evidently, the faster you go in your car, the shorter your ruler must become and the slower your clock must tick relative to mine; that is the only way we can continue to agree on the speed of light. (If I were to pull out a pair of binoculars and look at your speeding car, I would actually see its length contracted and you moving in slow motion inside.) So Einstein set about recasting the laws of physics accordingly. To make these laws absolute, he made distance and time relative.

It was the sacrifice of absolute time that was most stunning. Isaac Newton believed that time was regulated by a sort of cosmic grandfather clock. "Absolute, true, mathematical time, of itself, and from its own nature, flows equably without relation to anything external," he declared at the beginning of his "Principia." Einstein, however, realized that our idea of time is something we abstract from our experience with rhythmic phenomena: heartbeats, planetary rotations and revolutions, the ticking of clocks. Time judgments always come down to judgments of simultaneity. "If, for instance, I say, 'That train arrives here at 7 o'clock,' I mean something like this: 'The pointing of the small hand of my watch to 7 and the arrival of the train are simultaneous events,' " Einstein wrote in the June paper. If the events in question are at some distance from one another, judgments of simultaneity can be made only by sending light signals back and forth. Working from his two basic principles, Einstein proved that whether an observer deems two events to be happening "at the same time" depends on his state of motion. In other words, there is no universal *now*. With different observers slicing up the timescape into "past," "present," and "future" in different ways, it seems to follow that all moments coexist with equal reality.

Einstein's conclusions were the product of pure thought, proceeding from the most austere assumptions about nature. In the century since he derived them, they have been precisely confirmed by experiment after experiment. Yet his June, 1905, paper on relativity was rejected when he submitted it as a dissertation. (He then submitted his April paper, on the size of atoms, which he thought would be less likely to startle the examiners; they accepted it only after he added one sentence to meet the length threshold.) When Einstein was awarded the 1921 Nobel Prize in Physics, it was for his work on the photoelectric effect. The Swedish Academy forbade him to make any mention of relativity in his acceptance speech. As it happened, Einstein was unable to attend the ceremony in Stockholm. He gave his Nobel lecture in Gothenburg, with King Gustav V seated in the front row. The King wanted to learn about relativity, and Einstein obliged him.

In 1906, the year after Einstein's annus mirabilis, Kurt Gödel was born in the city of Brno (now in the Czech Republic). As Rebecca Goldstein recounts in her enthralling intellectual biography "Incompleteness: The Proof and Paradox of Kurt Gödel" (Atlas/Norton; $22.95), Kurt was both an inquisitive child—his parents and brother gave him the nickname *der Herr Warum*, "Mr. Why?"—and a nervous one. At the age of five, he seems to have suffered a mild anxiety neurosis. At eight, he had a terrifying bout of rheumatic fever, which left him with the lifelong conviction that his heart had been fatally damaged.

Gödel entered the University of Vienna in 1924. He had intended to study physics, but he was soon seduced by the beauties of mathematics, and especially by the notion that abstractions like numbers and circles had a perfect, timeless existence independent of the human mind. This doctrine, which is called Platonism, because it descends from Plato's theory of ideas, has always been popular among mathematicians. In the philosophical world of nineteen-twenties Vienna, however, it was considered distinctly old-fashioned. Among the many intellectual movements that flourished in the city's rich café culture, one of the most prominent was the Vienna Circle, a group of thinkers united in their belief that philosophy must be cleansed of metaphysics and made over in the image of science. Under the influence of Ludwig Wittgenstein, their reluctant guru, the members of the Vienna Circle regarded mathematics as a game played with symbols, a more intricate version of chess. What made a proposition like "2 + 2 = 4" true, they held, was not that it correctly described some abstract world of numbers but that it could be derived in a logical system according to certain rules.

Gödel was introduced into the Vienna Circle by one of his professors, but he kept quiet about his Platonist views. Being both rigorous and averse to controversy, he did not like to argue his convictions unless he had an airtight way of demonstrating that they were valid. But how could one demonstrate that mathematics could not be reduced to the artifices of logic? Gödel's strategy—one of "heart-stopping beauty," as Goldstein justly observes—was to use logic against itself. Beginning with a logical system for mathematics, one presumed to be free of contradictions, he invented an ingenious scheme that allowed the formulas in it to engage in a sort of double speak. A formula that said something about numbers could also, in this scheme, be interpreted as saying something about other formulas and how they were logically related to one another. In fact, as Gödel showed, a numerical formula could even

IN THE SAME SPACE

The sun set early in the Square, winter afternoons,
angling over the apartments to the west, so that light would bisect

the northern row of dark houses diagonally, the grand houses
that were suddenly not of the last century but of the century before.

Then the world would seem equally divided, a while, between the golden
and the chill, equipoise in a bitter year. When the sun was completely gone

we'd turn for home, the dogs and I, and to the south, the two towers,
harshly formal by day, brusque in their authority—

at the beginning of evening they'd go a blue a little darker than the sky,
lit from top to bottom by a wavering curtain of small, welcoming lamps.

—*Mark Doty*

be made to say something about itself. (Goldstein compares this to a play in which the characters are also actors in a play within the play; if the playwright is sufficiently clever, the lines the actors speak in the play within the play can be interpreted as having a "real life" meaning in the play proper.) Having painstakingly built this apparatus of mathematical self-reference, Gödel came up with an astonishing twist: he produced a formula that, while ostensibly saying something about numbers, also says, "I am not provable." At first, this looks like a paradox, recalling as it does the proverbial Cretan who announces, "All Cretans are liars." But Gödel's self-referential formula comments on its provability, not on its truthfulness. Could it be lying? No, because if it were, that would mean it could be proved, which would make it true. So, in asserting that it cannot be proved, it has to be telling the truth. But the truth of this proposition can be seen only from outside the logical system. Inside the system, it is neither provable nor disprovable. The system, then, is incomplete. The conclusion—that no logical system can capture all the truths of mathematics—is known as the first incompleteness theorem. Gödel also proved that no logical system for mathematics could, by its own devices, be shown to be free from inconsistency, a result known as the second incompleteness theorem.

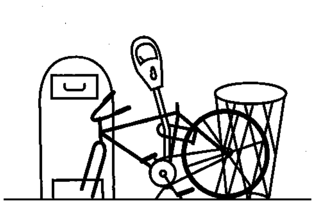
Wittgenstein once averred that "there can *never* be surprises in logic." But Gödel's incompleteness theorems did come as a surprise. In fact, when the fledgling logician presented them at a conference in the German city of Königsberg in 1930, almost no one was able to make any sense of them. What could it mean to say that a mathematical proposition was true if there was no possibility of proving it? The very idea seemed absurd. Even the once great logician Bertrand Russell was baffled; he seems to have been under the misapprehension that Gödel had detected an inconsistency in mathematics. "Are we to think that 2 + 2 is not 4, but 4.001?" Russell asked decades later in dismay, adding that he was "glad [he] was no longer working at mathematical logic." As the significance of Gödel's theorems began to sink in, words like "debacle," "catastrophe," and "nightmare" were bandied about. It had been an article of faith that, armed with logic, mathematicians could in principle resolve any conundrum at all—that in mathematics, as it had been famously declared, there was no *ignorabimus*. Gödel's theorems seemed to have shattered this ideal of complete knowledge.

That was not the way Gödel saw it. He believed he had shown that mathematics has a robust reality that transcends any system of logic. But logic, he was convinced, is not the only route to knowledge of this reality; we also have something like an extrasensory perception of it, which he called "mathematical intuition." It is this faculty of intuition that allows us to see, for example, that the formula saying "I am not provable" must be true, even though it defies proof within the system where it lives. Some thinkers (like the physicist Roger Penrose) have taken this theme further, maintaining that Gödel's incompleteness theorems have profound implications for the nature of the human mind. Our mental powers, it is argued, must outstrip those of any computer, since a computer is just a logical system running on hardware, and our minds can arrive at truths that are beyond the reach of a logical system.

Gödel was twenty-four when he proved his incompleteness theorems (a bit younger than Einstein was when he created relativity theory). At the time, much to the disapproval of his strict Lutheran parents, he was courting an older Catholic divorcée by the name of Adele, who, to top things off, was employed as a dancer in a Viennese night club called Der Nachtfalter (the Moth). The political situation in Austria was becoming ever more chaotic with Hitler's rise to power in Germany, although Gödel seems scarcely to have noticed. In 1936, the Vienna Circle dissolved, after its founder was assassinated by a deranged student. Two years later came the Anschluss. The perilousness of the times was finally borne in upon Gödel when a band of Nazi youths roughed him up and knocked off his glasses, before retreating under the umbrella blows of Adele. He resolved to leave for Princeton, where he had been offered a position by the Institute for Advanced Study. But, the war having broken out, he judged it too risky to cross the Atlantic. So the now married couple took the long way around, traversing Russia, the Pacific, and the United States, and finally arriving in Princeton in early 1940. At the institute, Gödel was given an office almost directly above Einstein's. For the rest of his life he rarely left Princeton, which he came to find "ten times more congenial" than his once beloved Vienna.

"There it was, inconceivably, *K. Goedel*, listed just like any other name in the bright orange Princeton community phonebook," writes Goldstein, who came to Princeton University as a graduate student of philosophy in the early nineteen-seventies. (It's the setting of her novel "The Mind-Body Problem.") "It was like opening up the local phonebook and finding *B. Spinoza* or *I. Newton*." Although Gödel was still little known in the world at large, he had a godlike status among the cognoscenti. "I once found the philosopher Richard Rorty standing in a bit of a daze in Davidson's food market," Goldstein writes. "He told me in hushed tones that he'd just seen Gödel in the frozen food aisle."

So naïve and otherworldly was the great logician that Einstein felt obliged to help look after the practical aspects of his life. One much retailed story concerns Gödel's decision after the war to become an American citizen. The character witnesses at his hearing were to be Einstein and Oskar Morgenstern, one of the founders of game theory. Gödel took the matter of citizenship with great solemnity, preparing for the exam by making a close study of the United States Constitution. On the eve of the hearing, he called Morgenstern in an agitated state, saying he had found an "inconsistency" in the Constitution, one that could allow a dictatorship to arise. Morgenstern was amused, but he realized that Gödel was serious and urged him not to mention it to the judge, fearing that it would jeopardize Gödel's citizenship bid. On the short drive to Trenton the next day, with Morgenstern serving as chauffeur, Einstein tried to distract Gödel with jokes. When they arrived at the courthouse, the judge was impressed by Gödel's eminent witnesses, and he invited the trio into his chambers. After some small talk, he said to Gödel, "Up to now you have held German citizenship."



No, Gödel corrected, Austrian.

"In any case, it was under an evil dictatorship," the judge continued. "Fortunately that's not possible in America."

"On the contrary, I can prove it is possible!" Gödel exclaimed, and he began describing the constitutional loophole he had descried. But the judge told the examinee that "he needn't go into that," and Einstein and Morgenstern succeeded in quieting him down. A few months later, Gödel took his oath of citizenship.

Around the same time that Gödel was studying the Constitution, he was also taking a close look at Einstein's relativity theory. The key principle of relativity is that the laws of physics should be the same for all observers. When Einstein first formulated the principle in his revolutionary 1905 paper, he restricted "all observers" to those who were moving uniformly relative to one another—that is, in a straight line and at a constant speed. But he soon realized that this restriction was arbitrary. If the laws of physics were to provide a truly objective description of nature, they ought to be valid for observers moving in any way relative to one another—spinning, accelerating, spiralling, whatever. It was thus that Einstein made the transition from his "special" theory of relativity of 1905 to his "general" theory, whose equations he worked out over the next decade and published in 1916. What made those equations so powerful was that they explained gravity, the force that governs the over-all shape of the cosmos.

Decades later, Gödel, walking with Einstein, had the privilege of picking up the subtleties of relativity theory from the master himself. Einstein had shown that the flow of time depended on motion and gravity, and that the division of events into "past" and "future" was relative. Gödel took a more radical view: he believed that time, as it was intuitively understood, did not exist *at all.* As usual, he was not content with a mere verbal argument. Philosophers ranging from Parmenides, in ancient times, to Immanuel Kant, in the eighteenth century, and on to J. M. E. McTaggart, at the beginning of the twentieth century, had produced such arguments, inconclusively. Gödel wanted a proof that had the rigor and certainty of mathematics. And he saw just what he wanted lurking within relativity theory. He presented his argument to Einstein for his seventieth birthday, in 1949, along with an etching. (Gödel's wife had knitted Einstein a sweater, but she decided not to send it.)

What Gödel found was the possibility of a hitherto unimaginable kind of universe. The equations of general relativity can be solved in a variety of ways. Each solution is, in effect, a model of how the universe might be. Einstein, who believed on philosophical grounds that the universe was eternal and unchanging, had tinkered with his equations so that they would yield such a model—a move he later called "my greatest blunder." Another physicist (a Jesuit priest, as it happens) found a solution corresponding to an expanding universe born at some moment in the finite past. Since this solution, which has come to be known as the Big Bang model, was consistent with what astronomers observed, it seemed to be the one that described the actual cosmos. But Gödel came up with a third kind of solution to Einstein's equations, one in which the universe was not expanding but rotating. (The centrifugal force arising from the rotation was what kept everything from collapsing under the force of gravity.) An observer in this universe would see all the galaxies slowly spinning around him; he would know it was the universe doing the spinning, and not himself, because he would feel no dizziness. What makes this rotating universe truly weird, Gödel showed, is the way its geometry mixes up space and time. By completing a sufficiently long round trip in a rocket ship, a resident of Gödel's universe could travel back to any point in his own past.

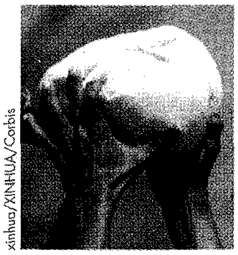
Einstein was not entirely pleased with the news that his equations permitted something as Alice in Wonderland-like as spatial paths that looped backward in time; in fact, he confessed to being "disturbed" by Gödel's universe. Other physicists marvelled that time travel, previously the stuff of science fiction, was apparently consistent with the laws of physics. (Then they started worrying about what would happen if you went back to a time before you were born and killed your own grandfather.) Gödel himself drew a different moral. If time travel is possible, he submitted, then time itself is impossible. A past that can be revisited has not really passed. And the fact that the actual universe is expanding, rather than rotating, is irrelevant. Time, like God, is either necessary or nothing; if it disappears in one possible universe, it is undermined in every possible universe, including our own.

Gödel's conclusion went almost entirely unnoticed at the time, but it has since found a passionate champion in Palle Yourgrau, a professor of philosophy at Brandeis. In "A World Without Time: The Forgotten Legacy of Gödel and Einstein" (Perseus; $24), Yourgrau does his best to redress his fellow-philosophers' neglect of the case that Gödel made against time. The "deafening silence," he submits, can be blamed on the philosophical prejudices of the era. Behind all the esoteric mathematics, Gödel's reasoning looked suspiciously metaphysical. To this day, Yourgrau complains, Gödel is treated with condescension by philosophers, who regard him, in the words of one, as "a logician par excellence but a philosophical fool." After ably tracing Gödel's life, his logical achievements, and his friendship with Einstein, Yourgrau elaborately defends his importance as a philosopher of time. "In a deep sense," he concludes, "we all do live in Gödel's universe."

Gödel's strange cosmological gift was received by Einstein at a bleak time in his life. His quest for a unified theory of physics was proving fruitless, and his opposition to quantum theory alienated him from the mainstream of physics. Family life provided little consolation. His two marriages had been failures; a daughter born out of wedlock seems to have disappeared from history; of his two sons one was schizophrenic, the other estranged. Einstein's circle of friends had shrunk to Gödel and a few others. One of them was Queen Elisabeth of Belgium, to whom he confided, in March, 1955, that "the exaggerated esteem in which my lifework is held makes me very ill at ease. I feel compelled to think of myself as an involuntary swindler." He died a month later, at the age of seventy-six. When Gödel and another colleague went to his office at the institute to deal with his papers, they found the blackboard covered with dead-end equations.

After Einstein's death, Gödel became ever more withdrawn. He preferred to conduct all conversations by telephone, even if his interlocutor was a few feet distant. When he especially wanted to avoid someone, he would schedule a rendezvous at a precise time and place, and then make sure he was somewhere far away. The honors the world wished to bestow upon him made him chary. He did show up to collect an honorary doctorate in 1953 from Harvard, where his incompleteness theorems were hailed as the most important mathematical discovery of the previous hundred years; but he later complained of being "thrust quite undeservedly into the most highly bellicose company" of John Foster Dulles, a co-honoree. When he was awarded the National Medal of Science, in 1975, he refused to go to Washington to meet Gerald Ford at the White House, despite the offer of a chauffeur for him and his wife. He had hallucinatory episodes and talked darkly of certain forces at work in the world "directly submerging the good." Fearing that there was a plot to poison him, he persistently refused to eat. Finally, looking like (in the words of a friend) "a living corpse," he was taken to the Princeton Hospital. There, two weeks later, on January 14, 1978, he succumbed to self-starvation. According to his death certificate, the cause of death was "malnutrition and inanition" brought on by "personality disturbance."

A certain futility marked the last years of both Gödel and Einstein. What may have been most futile, however, was their willed belief in the unreality of time. The temptation was understandable. If time is merely in our minds, perhaps we can hope to escape it into a timeless eternity. Then we could say, like William Blake, "I see the Past, Present and Future, existing all at once / Before me." In Gödel's case, Rebecca Goldstein speculates, it may have been his childhood terror of a fatally damaged heart that attracted him to the idea of a timeless universe. Toward the end of his life, he told one confidant that he had long awaited an epiphany that would enable him to see the world in a new light, but that it never came. Einstein, too, was unable to make a clean break with time. "To those of us who believe in physics," he wrote to the widow of a friend who had recently died, "this separation between past, present, and future is only an illusion, if a stubborn one." When his own turn came, a couple of weeks later, he said, "It is time to go." ♦



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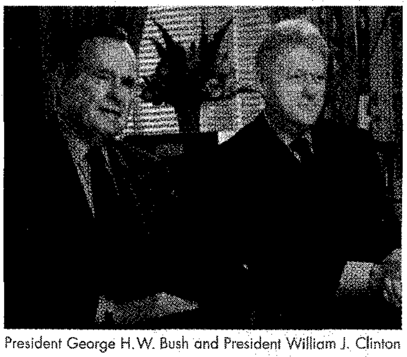

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BOOKS

DIRTY DANCING

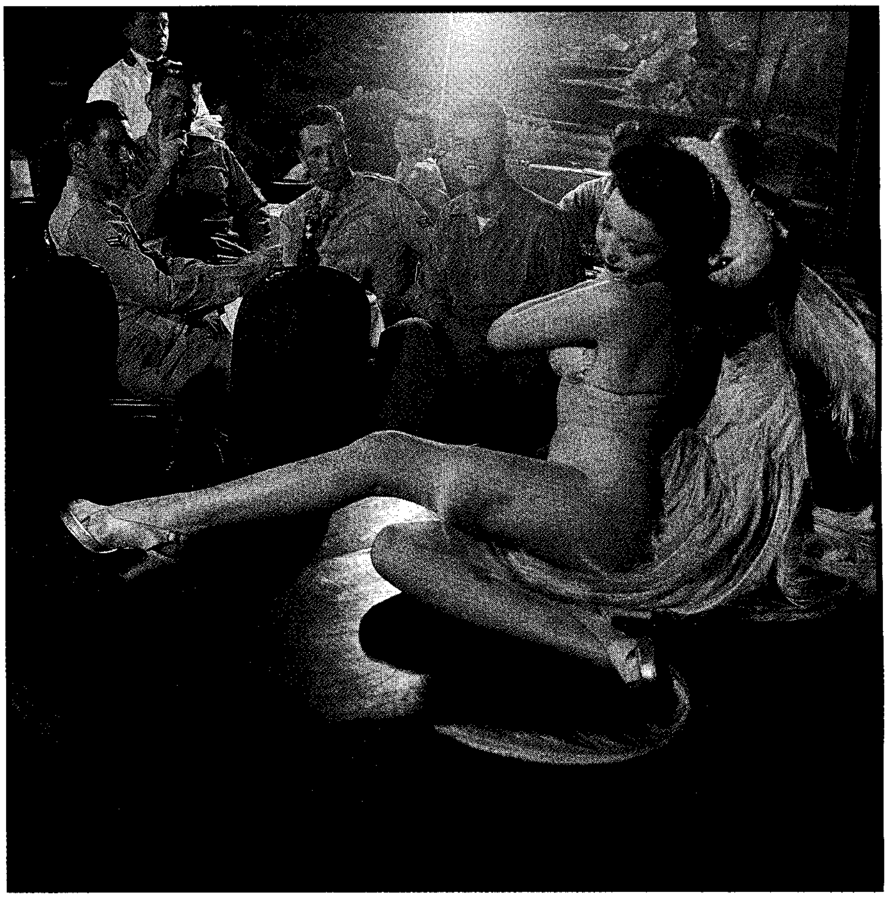
The rise and fall of American striptease.

BY FRANCINE DU PLESSIX GRAY

On a weekend afternoon in the bland, uptight nineteen-fifties, shortly after I'd finished college, my parents persuaded my boyfriend, who was always eager to please them, to take us to New Jersey to attend a burlesque and striptease show. This form of entertainment had been banned in Manhattan for more than a decade but was thriving across the Hudson, and expeditions of our kind weren't unusual for enlightened New Yorkers and their grown children. So we piled into the car, mother, stepfather, boyfriend, and I, and went to Union City's Hudson Theatre, where the pie-throwing episodes and lewd dialogues of classical burlesque alternated with a succession of gorgeously clad women who, to the strains of such numbers as "Blues in the Night," very slowly and majestically disrobed.

One stripper that I remember particularly well was attired in a sumptuous black sequinned evening gown, with a huge feather boa draped across her shoulders. As a raucous male chorus of "Take it off! Take it off!" rang out through the theatre, she lingered for a good five minutes over the disposal of her gloves alone, strutting about the stage with an expression of smoldering aloofness. With the same excruciating languor (by this time the teen-age boys in the audience had placed their coats over their laps), she proceeded to divest herself of her boa, her gown, her panties. And, finally, wearing no more than a sequinned G-string and the spangled papier-mâché pasties with which performers covered their nipples, she pranced about for a few more taunting pouts and winks, her plump breasts bouncing above her small, curvaceous waist, before leaving the stage amid appreciative catcalls and thunderous applause.

Are these girls ever in charge! I thought as I watched two or three other performers go through similar routines of provocation and denial, of gratification indefinitely postponed. As an independent young woman coming of age in the Eisenhower era, I'd been offered few female role models beyond the bleakly emancipated Simone de Beauvoir, and these New Jersey strippers incarnated many principles of defiance that I was searching for in my own life. Maintaining total control over the pace of male desire, deriding the absurdity of lust even as they were inciting it, they seemed to be saying, "I'll do whatever I like with my body, because it's no one's but my own."



A Fifty-second Street night club in the nineteen-forties. Photograph by Burt Glinn.

MAGNUM

How could I have foreseen that the tradition of striptease as we'd known it for some three decades was on the verge of its demise? It was to be killed off by the general pornification of society which began to affect American culture in the nineteen-sixties. For the striptease tradition had a paradoxically anti-erotic function, which its most highbrow commentator, the French critic Roland Barthes, described as a kind of vaccination: inoculating the male public, he argued, with a tiny, highly controlled dose of naughtiness—the vision of languorously disrobing females—might well immunize it against the greater threat of unleashed lust. But who could be immunized by the sight of a G-string when the entire cast of "Oh! Calcutta!" (a pun on the French phrase "*Oh, quel cul t'as*," "Oh, what an ass you have") were nightly exposing their private parts to audiences of hundreds? By the time my own children came of age, in the nineteen-seventies and eighties, the art of striptease had become a mid-century artifact as passé as waist cinches, white kid gloves, and Buddy Holly's "Peggy Sue."

Up to now, there has been curiously little satisfying literature about this venerable American genre. A number of entertainers have published their reminiscences in the past few years, but, with one or two exceptions, these have tended to be tedious. So the first serious history of the form, Rachel Shteir's "Striptease: The Untold History of the Girlie Show" (Oxford; $30), could prove to be a landmark work. Shteir, who is the head of the Dramaturgy and Dramatic Criticism Program at DePaul University, in Chicago, operates from two premises: that the element of tease is as important to the form as the element of strip (the words were not linked until the late nineteen-twenties), and that the essence of striptease consists in a rigorous maintenance of distance between the performer and the viewer. As Gypsy Rose Lee once said, flesh must be "hinted at rather than hollered about" to reach that illusion of seduction which is central to the stripper's art.

Striptease, in Shteir's chronology, begins with classical dance, which played a major role in eventually making nudity respectable. Wearing the diaphanous gowns of early-nineteenth-century Romantic ballet, the French ballerina Francisque Hutin and the Italian Marie Taglioni caused a brouhaha on both sides of the Atlantic by displaying their calves through pirouettes and fouettés, at a time when only prostitutes publicly exhibited their ankles. A half century later, the buttock-baring cancan dances that evolved in the music halls of Second Empire Paris further legitimatized the exposure of the female leg. And the turn-of-the-century craze for history's first stripper, Salome, prompted numerous veil-shedding performances on the popular stage, and inspired scores of European artists and writers—Gustave Flaubert, Oscar Wilde, and Richard Strauss among them.

According to Shteir, the first outright undressing act in the history of Western theatre was a Belle Époque French skit called "Le Coucher d'Yvette" ("Yvette's Bedtime"), in which a woman demurely stripped from her evening wear to her chemise and ultimately down to a prim nightgown, and climbed into bed—at which point the stage lights went out. (The skit was so influential to the American striptease tradition that a variant of it was still being performed by the most gorgeous performer of the postwar years, Lili St. Cyr, in the late nineteen-fifties.) As for the genre's homegrown variety, it evolved in the last decades of the nineteenth century as a subcategory of the burlesque tradition, a form of popular entertainment that began in New York's immigrant slums—Coney Island, the Lower East Side—but quickly spread throughout the country, flourishing with particular vitality in the Midwest, and eventually honing the talents of many great American comics, from Jimmy Durante and Abbott and Costello to Lenny Bruce and Milton Berle. If the strip was European, the tease seems to have been thoroughly Yankee.

Derived from the Italian *burlesco*, a satire achieved through parody, burlesque celebrated the underdog, mocked the upper classes, strove to ease the tensions of the American melting pot through sallies of coarse ethnic humor, and, unlike the chaster vaudeville, allayed gender tensions through heavy sexual innuendo. (Minister, approaching a pretty woman: "Do you believe in the hereafter?" Woman: "Certainly I do." Minister (leering): "Then you know what I'm here after.") By the turn of the century, a typical burlesque format would include clowning skits suffused with just that kind of coarse humor; baggy-pants male dancers; chorus-line numbers; and girlie acts in which women, performing the hootchy-kootchy and bump-and-grind routines—favorites of the travelling carnival circuit—exposed legs and bosoms to degrees heretofore unprecedented on the American stage.

In the decades that followed the First World War, burlesque grew into a huge business, and came to be dominated by three families, who put their stamp on American popular theatre for many decades to come—the Ziegfelds, the Shuberts, and the Minskys. Another well-known producer, Billy Rose, wrote one of the most popular burlesque ditties of the period, "Countess Dubinsky," for his wife, Fanny Brice. The song concerns a fallen Russian aristocrat—she recalls the days when "Nicolai and his princes nibbled nightly on my blintzes"—who finds herself "right down to her skinsky, working for Minsky." Skinsky, indeed, became an increasingly important feature of burlesque with the advent of Prohibition, when theatre owners, impoverished by the loss of liquor sales, survived only by bringing on more and more girls wearing less and less clothing.

Thus began the golden age of striptease, and the establishment of a genre that, along with jazz and film, was a distinctly American contribution to popular culture. Shows became extravaganzas: one revue at a New York theatre featured gigantic bubbles, marble statues, outsized crystal chandeliers, revolving flower displays, dozens of women swathed in clear plastic ("virgins wrapped in cellophane," as they were known), and rainbow lighting effects more lavish than those of the Folies-Bergère. When Billy Minsky moved his clever numbers ("Mind Over Mattress," "The Sway of All Flesh") uptown to Broadway's Republic Theatre, next door to Noël Coward's "Private Lives," striptease began to draw as many women as men. The advent of the Second World War only buoyed the industry, under the rationale that such spectacles were essential to the morale of soldiers and sailors on leave. "Strip for Action" and "Star and Garter" appeared on Broadway, and Hollywood produced many films that linked stripping to wartime patriotism. In "Stage Door Canteen," one can still enjoy the work of Gypsy Rose Lee, a remarkable woman whose career epitomized the mid-century's rage for striptease, and whose saga Shteir chronicles with particular verve.

Living in the United States in the nineteen-thirties, forties, or fifties, one would have had to be Amish not to know about Gypsy Rose Lee. Brainy, tall, and majestic (all great strippers, Shteir reminds us, have been tall), Gypsy was a self-styled intellectual who enjoyed rolling down her garters while romping through references to Cézanne and Oscar Wilde. Shteir dubs her "the Dorothy Parker of burlesque" because of her love of good society—she hobnobbed with Clare Boothe Luce, Carl Van Doren, George Jean Nathan, and Janet Flanner—and her ready wit ("God is love, but get it in writing"). She had a gold-monogrammed Rolls-Royce and a chauffeur, and liked to show off her French. While keeping up with a hefty performing schedule, she published short stories in *The New Yorker* and wrote a best-selling thriller—the "G-String Murders"—which was made into an immensely successful film, "Lady of Burlesque." The Broadway and cinema versions of her autobiography, "Gypsy," were equally lucrative. By mid-century, she had become so famous that other prominent strippers like Ann Corio began to emulate her by dropping references to Spinoza and Omar Khayyám. Rodgers and Hart, in their musical "Pal Joey," had a song called "Zip" that rather maliciously derided Gypsy's bluestocking dazzle: "Zip! Walter Lippman wasn't brilliant today / Zip! Will Saroyan ever write a great play? / Zip! I was reading Schopenhauer last night / Zip! And I don't think that Schopenhauer was right."

Fiorello LaGuardia, who described striptease as "commercialized vice" and as "entertainment for morons and perverts," was the first of several mayors who, from the nineteen-thirties on, tried to prohibit striptease in New York City. His relentless anti-vice campaign, which finally succeeded in 1942, when the city's last burlesque house closed, only increased the entertainment's allure, driving the public to New Jersey in ever greater numbers and inciting a wave of support from civil-liberties groups and the intelligentsia. Helen Hayes deplored "the spectacle of free Americans being robbed of a livelihood without a trial." And Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse, the authors of the ultra-respectable Broadway play "Life with Father," drew bold parallels between LaGuardia's autocratic censoring policies and Hitler's "methods of totalitarianism," warning that "we are at Munich." But, despite similar reform campaigns and countless police raids and arrests in other cities, striptease would continue to flourish throughout the United States, from Vegas to Miami.

Which leads both author and reader to ponder the paradox of striptease's eventual disappearance, obliterated by sexuality itself, in its more exaggerated forms: by the magazines *Hustler* and *Screw;* by live-sex peep shows, pole dancing, lap dancing, topless or even bottomless go-go bars, and the numerous permutations denoted by the tenuous term "exotic dancing"; and, above all, by the rise of the porn-film industry. It is indeed symbolic that one of the last existing burlesque houses in the nation—Kansas City's Folly Theatre—was closed in 1969 to make space for an adult-film theatre. A local newspaper headline announced the news: "OLD GRIND GETS BUMPED."

Shteir's meticulous history makes some mention of the better-known performers' private lives: Blaze Starr's scandalous affair with Governor Earl Long, of Louisiana; the fan dancer Sally Rand's being driven to bankruptcy by Chicago mobsters (the industry had some perilous links to the underworld); strippers' proclivity to unhappy marriages—Gypsy Rose Lee, Sally Rand, Lili St. Cyr, and Rose La Rose each divorced a few husbands before calling it quits. Yet although Shteir alludes to the biographical details that led some of these women to the girlie trade—alcoholic or abusive parents, Gypsy Rose Lee's stagestruck mother, the role model offered Tempest Storm by her showgirl sister Jewel—she gives us very few clues to the stripper's internal life. I, for one, crave to know more about the psychology of females who enjoy disrobing before droves of paying strangers. In this regard, Lily Burana's 2001 memoir, "Strip City: A Stripper's Farewell Journey Across America" (Miramax Books; $23.95), makes wonderful supplementary reading. While providing a zesty firsthand survey of contemporary girlie shows, it offers insights unavailable in any academic study such as Shteir's.

Burana, a journalist and former exotic dancer who decided to travel cross-country stripping, as a kind of finale to her former career, tells us that she relishes taunting men because she is revolted by their erotic neediness. She seems to enjoy the personality split experienced by most women in the trade, extolling the "skill, comfort, risk, dissociation, or a combination of them all that, in rare moments, makes stripping seem like a borderline ecstatic state." As she works her way across the country, documenting places with names like Mons Venus, Pop-a-Top Pub, Chills & Thrills, and Booby Trap, she gives us a sense of the versatility, resilience, and self-control that a performer needs in order to survive. She takes us to clubs where d.j.s severely bleat orders to "keep your hands at your sides and your tongue in your mouth," and to even more flagrant places, where dancers are expected to "show pink" from behind a glass screen. ("They fix their gaze on [your vulva] like they're waiting for it to say something profound," she writes.) She describes establishments in which topless dancers aren't allowed to be within six feet of a customer, others in which girls do "totally nude, full-grind lap dances with ample fondling privileges," and still others in which a dancer must endure the stink of "mildewing carpet, ammonia . . . dirty wigs, and sperm," the sight of "a parade of dicks," and "so many ejaculations it's like a bad porn film." She explains that every successful stripper needs to possess a potent narcissism which will allow her to feel "all the hearts in the room gathered into the palm of my hand."

Burana looks on stripping—as I did when I was a young woman—as a feminist enterprise that affirms the notion of women's self-determination. "These are the dawning days of sex-positive feminism—when the notion of female desire is being reevaluated," she tells us. "We . . . are gender warriors, reestablishing the parameters of enlightened female behavior." But whatever benefits to women Burana sees in the profession, her chronicle often left me wondering whether lap dancing might not have been invented by the dry-cleaning industry. Her feminist premise strikes me as somewhat suspect: she glamorizes the skin trade while tending to understate its seamier monetary aspects—the financial stresses that often drive women into the business, and the cynical male economy that guides it. Throughout her book, Shteir intimates that most women would prefer any other job—be it janitor, artist, model, or gambler—to stripping.

Both books make clear the vast differences between the nineteen-fifties striptease tradition and its current incarnations: whereas the earlier variety spoofed women's disrobing, the girls in many contemporary shows start off nude—all stripped and no tease—offering us a deadpan emulation of the act itself. Faced with such spectacles, one doesn't necessarily protest against the propagation of smut. Rather, one is saddened by the diminution of sexual desire. The promise of sex tends to be far more erotic than its fulfillment, and striptease maintained its erotic allure by elaborating on the phase during which desire is at its fiercest.

Striptease, as I see it, was yet another example of the human animal's intractable need for order, for it ritualized the most disorderly moment of the carnal act: its prelude. Every other phase of the sexual performance, after all, has its set of protocols, but what rules of procedure govern its preamble, which is so intimately linked to the initial decision to engage in the act at all? What anxiety (especially for women) often accompanies that decision, what fear of ridicule can suffuse our denuding! And, in our more passionate moments, what haste and mayhem prevail in the disposal of our undergarments as they are hurled across a room!

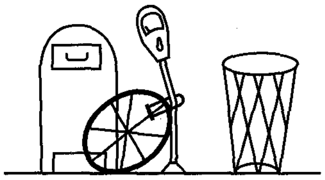
No wonder the Salome legend and its twentieth-century variants have been so tenacious. The ritualization of disrobing—the inoculative mini-dose of sex, in Barthes's terms, offered by traditional striptease—imposed a leisurely pace and orderliness, a humorous female domesticity, upon the act's most hectic, nerve-racking moment. Scoffing, through its cool, sly majesty of tempo, at the ridiculous immediacy of human lust, it was a genre uniquely suited to the last era of American culture that was still informed by powerful sexual interdictions, a genre which fills members of my generation with nostalgia for the taboos that made our transgressions so pleasurable.

No one better understood the dialectic of repression and transgression that fuelled the art of striptease than the genre's most notorious practitioner, Gypsy Rose Lee, who ended her days in prosperous retirement, selling high-end pet foods in California. "A woman doesn't take it off like an onion skin," she once remarked. "That would make me cry." ♦

BRIEFLY NOTED

Snobs, *by Julian Fellowes (St. Martin's; $23.95).* Fellowes, a late bloomer who wrote the script for "Gosford Park," again portrays the British upper class in his début novel. One Edith Lavery marries up, snagging the Earl of Broughton, a man who lives for his country estates and thanks his wife after each of their brief sexual encounters. Edith soon takes up with a handsome actor and runs for cover from her mother-in-law, the formidable Googie. The polite firefights that ensue are very readable, but their presentation is somewhat muddled. Fellowes, who, the dust jacket reveals, has a son named Peregrine and a dachshund named Fudge, may identify too closely with this social stratum. Although he convincingly portrays the habits of the entitled, they escape the skewering that the title leads us to expect. The result is a watered-down satire that eventually becomes an apologia for Edwardian England, where everyone knew his place and no one was tacky.

Milk, *by Darcey Steinke (Bloomsbury; $17.95).* Steinke's idiosyncratic, unsentimental fourth novel continues her examination of sexual and religious obsession. While caring for a small baby and waiting for an absent husband, Mary sees her kitchen ceiling produce showers of sparks. She encounters a lapsed monk named John who suggests that her sparks may be an "aleph, a point in space that contains all points." After sleeping with John, Mary abandons her husband and moves into the church where her friend Walter is the pastor. Walter is dogged by the memory of his dead lover, Carlos, even as he trawls New York for erotic excitement. All the characters struggle to establish a relationship with God through contact with those around them, but Steinke's prose repeatedly hints at the divine in tangible things.



Can't Stop Won't Stop, *by Jeff Chang (St. Martin's; $27.95).* The birth of hip-hop out of the ruin of the South Bronx is a story that has been told many times, but never with the cinematic scope and the analytic force that Chang brings to it. Robert Moses unleashes the destructive juggernaut of the Cross-Bronx Expressway; landlords set fire to worthless tenements; police stand by and do nothing; and, against a backdrop of gang warfare, peacemaking d.j.s lay down the heavy beats and spidery loops around which a rapping, dancing, graffiti-painting culture grows. This is one of the most urgent and passionate histories of popular music ever written. Chang is blind to no one's greed or viciousness, but he retains an idealistic view of a music that speaks the truth about the alternately stultifying and horrifying urban landscapes that the parents who hate hip-hop have made.

My Life in Orange, *by Tim Guest (Harcourt; $14).* Guest's memoir recalls an ambulant childhood—a ranch here, an ashram there—among the disciples of the infamous guru Bhagwan Rajneesh, a Rolls-Royce-driving charismatic who instructed his followers to wear only the colors of the sun and to liberate themselves from bourgeois hang-ups. For his followers, the Bhagwan's communes were lands of plenty, filled with sex, drugs, t'ai-chi sessions, and primal-scream therapies. Their children, however, survived largely on their wits: Guest and his friends swipe beedi cigarettes from the commissary and get high on Darjeeling, but they're starved for belonging and belongings. One of Guest's attempts to spend time with his mother is thwarted by a sign that reads, "Motherhood Group in Progress. Please Do Not Disturb." Occasionally, his recriminations smack of a similar self-indulgence, but, as the guru's regime crumbles, Guest's account of paradise lost gains acuity from the fact that, for him, it was mostly hell in the first place.

THE THEATRE

PERFORMANCE ANXIETY

Three Off Broadway plays.

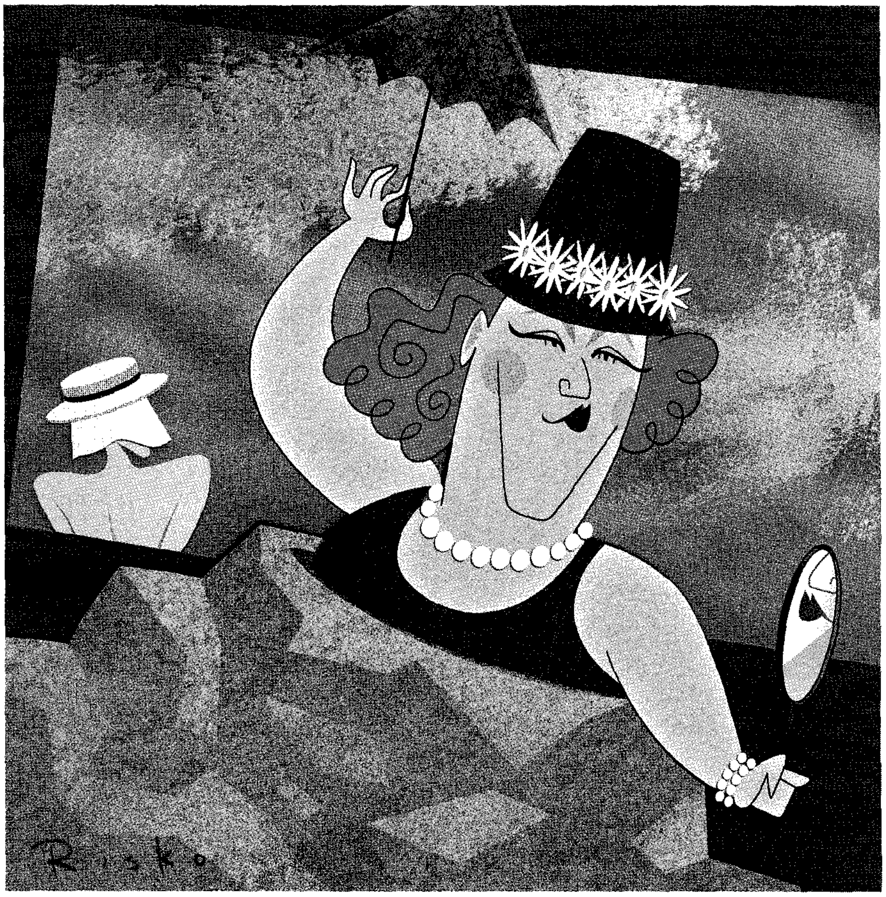
BY HILTON ALS

As most writers know, the best editors tend to curtail those characteristics of the artist which are the weakest and the most self-serving, in order to free him or her from the prison of egocentricity. Similarly, actors need firm-handed directors to curb their excesses and to divert any tendency toward cuteness. One of the major problems with performance-based artists and comedians is that they often fall in love with their own material and their rendition of it. All artists have a streak of the solipsist; their loneliness and self-interest are what propel them to make art in the first place. But that doesn't mean that anyone wants to watch those thrashings, onstage or off: it's like standing around at a cocktail party while a drunk rages on, demanding incoherently all the attention in the room.

Lea DeLaria, who has worked as a comedian, singer, and actress in a number of shows around town (she was a memorable Hildy in George C. Wolfe's Broadway production of "On the Town"), cuts quite a figure. Small and powerfully built, she has a strong singing voice and excellent comic timing. An openly gay artist, she has always reminded me of a sapphic Martha Raye—all quick double takes and hard slapstick turns. One could not call DeLaria the most nuanced of artists, and that is usually perfectly O.K.—as long as she is working within the context that a forceful director can provide. On her own, however, DeLaria brays when she should whisper, and her charming, exhaustive, and ultimately disaffecting approach to a role overwhelms us. Which is precisely what happens when she plays Winnie in Samuel Beckett's "Happy Days" (a Worth Street Theatre Company production, at the Classic Stage Company).

It must have seemed like a good idea at first: a chatty comedian playing the nearly indefatigable Winnie, a middle-aged woman whose incessant demand for attention is like a prayer of sorts, one that Winnie directs at herself. Winnie has the self-regard of an actress, an artist, without daring to become one. "Hail, holy light," she says, at the beginning of Act II. "Someone is looking at me still. (*Pause.*) Caring for me still. (*Pause.*) That is what I find so wonderful." With her body obscured by a mound of junk-strewn earth (the appropriate set is by David P. Gordon), she natters on and on about what fills her "happy days": her toothbrush, her husband, Willie (David Greenspan), who spends much of the play hidden from view. Winnie is a Christian, so she knows that she's not God. But the mountain of dirt (representing, perhaps, the detritus of her life) is her self-enclosed altar, and we are meant to worship at the foot of it. Like most egotists, however, Winnie lets her self-regard go a bit wobbly when she thinks no one is listening.

It's possible that DeLaria could have been a credible Winnie. She has an expressive face, and she takes great delight in performing. But she didn't have a chance of finding the role with the show's director, Jeff Cohen, pushing her to play up those aspects of the script that suit her own personality, rather than pursuing Beckett's idea of the character. Using more accents than I could keep track of, Cohen and DeLaria's Winnie amounts to a seminar on American comedy styles, ranging from the Chitlin Circuit to Minsky's. In the process, the Winnie I know—the one who is as much a representation of the little murders we commit on a daily basis as she is an examination of what performance, and especially female performance, can be—is lost.



Lea DeLaria's take on Beckett amounts to a seminar on American comedy styles.

ROBERT RISKO

Of all the characters that Beckett created at the start of the nineteen-sixties, Winnie is the most fully realized and emotionally accessible, perhaps an echo of his mother, who was known to be bossy and self-serving, and may have had a hand in her son's famous silences, on and off the page. Many of the characters in Beckett's work are shadow figures; Winnie is not. She is full-blooded enough—a sometimes amusing gargoyle—to require a substantial amount of technique. It's possible that, given more time, DeLaria could have developed that technique, but to do so she would have had to be willing to respect Beckett's intentions rather than her own.

Like Orson Welles and Joseph Papp before him, Christopher McElroen, the co-founder and executive director of the ever adventuresome Classical Theatre of Harlem, knows that casting is key—especially when it comes to Chekhov, whose "Cherry Orchard" he has adapted and staged (at the H.S.A.). "The Cherry Orchard," like most of Chekhov's works for the stage, is a kind of treatise on ensemble acting; Chekhov was fascinated by the ways in which a group does and does not work, by the self-interest that can divide people as they struggle toward an idea of community. It takes a strong group of actors to suggest all this without actually falling apart. And that's what McElroen has assembled here.

Set at the turn of the twentieth century, the play is a parable about the aristocracy's inability to adapt to changing times and its tumble under the crushing wheels of reality. By casting the play for the most part with black actors, McElroen has taken Chekhov's recurring theme of master and servant in many new directions. One cannot help but think of the antebellum South as one watches the formerly wealthy Ranevsky family fail to save their land and their home, which is eventually bought by Lopakhin (Wendell Pierce), a pleb in a checkered vest. And one cannot help thinking, too, of how race has restricted the careers of some of the actors onstage, who are among the best that we have. As Lyubov Ranevskaya, the self-obsessed, lovelorn gentlewoman who would rather dream of her family's past in the fabled cherry orchard than make a practical move to protect it (she's the gentler, less realistic sister to "The Seagull" 's Madame Arkadina), Petronia Paley is extraordinary—and so extraordinarily beautiful that one wonders why she is not a film star of the highest rank. (Among the supporting cast, the legendary Vinie Burrows brings a considerable amount of presence and unhurried humor to the governess Sharlotta, who performs magic tricks for her supper.) While most American theatre and film producers continue to see certain actresses for their color and not their talent, McElroen and his colleagues know better: by casting on the basis of race, directors limit the stage's possibilities.

One of the many terrific things about James Urbaniak as a performer is that he doesn't try to make his charming and idiosyncratic white-boy-ness anything other than what it is. In his star turn as a foot fetishist on "Sex and the City," he brought a kind of James Spader-meets-Crispin Glover slyness to the role. (Urbaniak was also memorable in his impersonation of the ur-cartoonist of creepiness, R. Crumb, in 2003's "American Splendor.") One can see how, with his understated approach, Urbaniak might be given short shrift by casting agents. He shouldn't be. He has a different kind of cinematic presence—an outward, sexy nerdiness that slowly insinuates itself into your consciousness. By the time you realize that you want more of his angularity of body and mind, though, Urbaniak (rhymes with "brainiac") has probably already moved on to embody other ideas, in front of other people.

Urbaniak gives a bravura performance as the title character in the monologue "Thom Pain (Based on Nothing)" (at the DR2), a man troubled by thought, or, rather, by the thoughts that become particularly troubling once you've suffered a breakup, which Thom Pain has. No amount of intellectualizing can distract him from the memory of his beloved's legs, face, and eyes. Although he tries to distance himself from his former love—whom he never names—by using any number of verbal tricks, all addressed to the audience, Thom's language breaks down as he recalls the essentially nonverbal memory of flesh on flesh. Ably directed by Hal Brooks, "Thom Pain" 's success is also due, in large part, to Will Eno's delicate, architectural script, which reminds us that theatregoing can be an exalted literary experience as well. ♦

CONSTABULARY NOTES FROM ALL OVER

From the Coupeville (Wash.) Examiner.

Reporting party states a subject on Patmore Road said he was enroute to his residence from Oak Harbor to go home and either work on his roof or kill himself.

To Picador
Happy 10th Birthday
From Andrew Sean Greer

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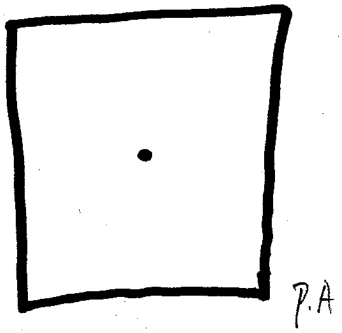

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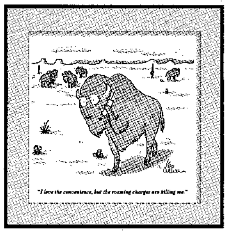

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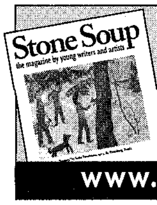

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MUSICAL EVENTS

FOUR HANDS

Piano performances by Radu Lupu and Piotr Anderszewski.

BY ALEX ROSS

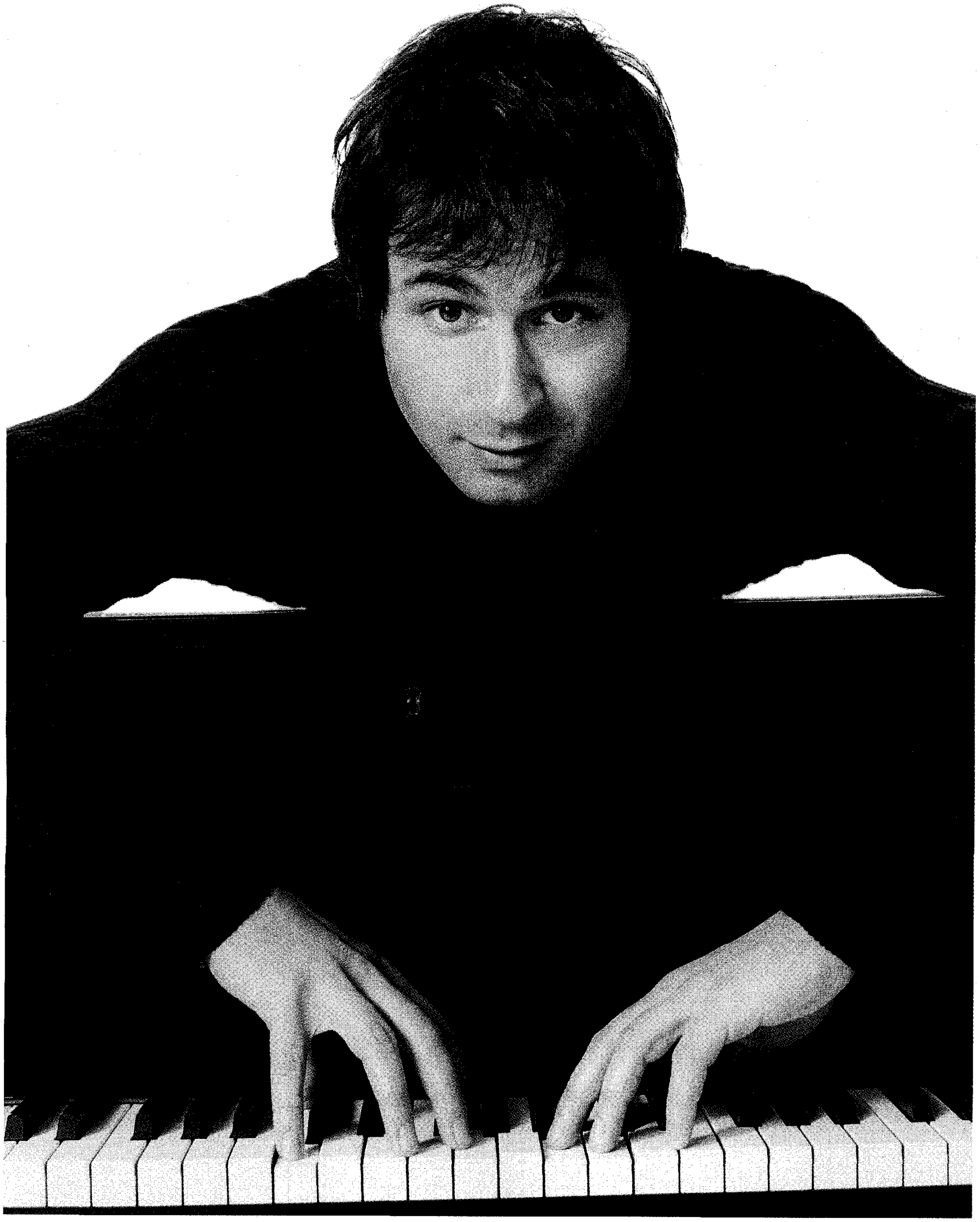
When Beethoven played the solo part in the première of his Third Piano Concerto, in 1803, he introduced a bewitching effect that lingered in the memory of his pupil Carl Czerny. The Largo movement begins with a luminous theme in the key of E. Beethoven applied the sustaining pedal throughout, so that the music became a haze of resonating tones—a "holy, distant, and celestial Harmony," Czerny said. According to the musicologist Leon Plantinga, Beethoven composed the Third Concerto just after he wrote his "Heiligenstadt Testament," in which he confessed that he would rather retire from society than publicly admit his deafness. There were many moments during Radu Lupu's recent traversal of the five Beethoven piano concertos, with the Cleveland Orchestra at Carnegie Hall, when that withdrawn, wounded figure came to life. In the Largo, you could almost see Beethoven walking away from his stormy C-minor world—or, if you prefer, walking from his world toward ours.

Lupu, a gentle genius of the piano, was born in Romania in 1945. With his scraggly beard, shy manner, and piercing eyes, he looks less like a jet-set virtuoso than an unsung radical poet, the kind you would expect to find huddled over gnomic manuscripts in the corner of an obscure café. In his youth, he played as loud and fast as anyone; he won the Van Cliburn Competition in 1966 with a thunderous performance of the Prokofiev Second Piano Concerto, evidence of which exists on a VAI recording. In the following years, Lupu disavowed showpieces and devoted himself to the high Austro-German repertory, from Mozart to Brahms. In 1970, he made a recording of Brahms's Intermezzos Opus 117 that is in my personal pantheon of the most beautiful piano records ever made. At a Carnegie recital in 1996, Lupu offered as his last encore the slow movement of Schubert's "Little" A-Major Sonata, and it wasn't so much a performance as a glimpse of a perfect world. No pianist gets a lovelier tone out of the instrument. How he does it is a bit of a mystery: the piano is, after all, an impersonal machine of levers and hammers. But an A above middle C sounds different under Lupu's finger. It glows from within.

It was strange, at first, to see this most confiding of pianists holding forth in front of the august Cleveland Orchestra. Yet the intimacy remained. I've rarely witnessed an orchestra and a soloist listening to each other so intently: this was a conversational give-and-take, not a tug-of-war between pre-set tempos. Franz Welser-Möst, the Cleveland's conductor, often kept the dynamics muted to chamber-music levels, so that Lupu never had to fight to be heard. In a classic Cleveland sound-mirage, string pizzicatos and soft woodwind tones seemed to emanate from the piano.

The Beethoven concertos are complex, multitiered constructions, in which the piano and the orchestra often head toward the same destination along separate paths: sonata and symphony are superimposed. Although Lupu was sometimes in danger of floating away into his own private pianosphere, he periodically called upon his old competition-winner style to produce a burly, quasi-orchestral sound. The transition from the slow movement of the "Emperor" Concerto to the finale was as electric as I've ever heard it: a meditative murmur of pedalled tones—"holy, distant, and celestial" again—gave way to a blunt oration of accented chords. The two sides of Beethoven's personality achieved perfect balance: as if with a gunshot, the poet became a hero.

If Lupu resembles a venerable underground artist, Piotr Anderszewski, a Polish-Hungarian pianist who has risen to prominence in the past few years, looks like a hip young thing in an Antonioni movie. At his recent recital at



Anderszewski's edgy flair is balanced by a gift for pure cantabile playing. Photograph by Ruven Afanador.

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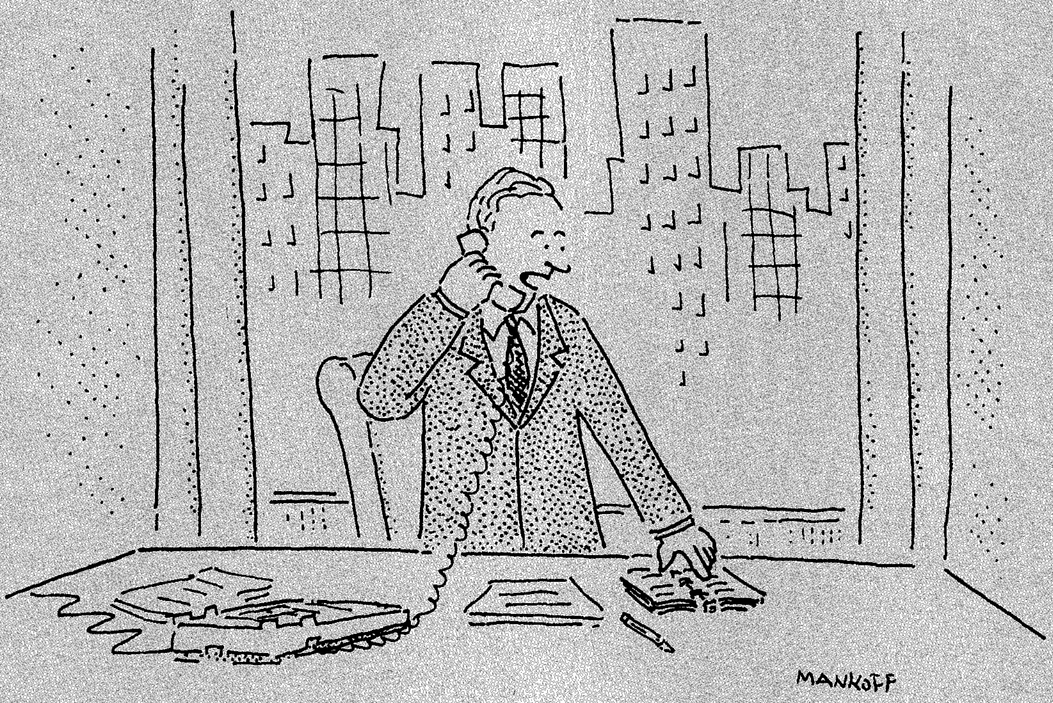

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Zankel Hall, Anderszewski walked onstage wearing Beatles bangs, a loose black jacket, and leather pants. He is thirty-five, and he's a serious, searching musician. If Lupu saunters through the music as if on a forest walk, Anderszewski whips around every corner like a spy. Balancing out his edgy flair is a gift for pure cantabile playing, nearly at the Lupu level.

The first musical impression is of a forceful, steely personality. In the opening movement of Bach's "French Overture," the sound bordered on the harsh. Possibly, Anderszewski miscalculated the acoustics of Zankel, which can give a tinny ring to fortissimos. There was more than a bit of Glenn Gould in the accenting of inner voices, in the highlighting of each line of counterpoint. This was proper in Bach, but peculiar in the first movement of the Chopin Third Sonata, which is something other than a fugue. Too many young pianists these days feel compelled to defamiliarize, interrogate, and otherwise discombobulate music of the Romantic repertory, as if the ghost of Stravinsky were admonishing them not to get too sentimental. I had heard the German pianist Lars Vogt operate in icy fashion on the Grieg Concerto the previous month. Anderszewski seemed on the verge of doing the same to Chopin. But, fortunately, he had more up his sleeve.

The great Largo of the Third Sonata encapsulated the narrative power of Anderszewski's playing. At first, an odd stress on accompanying chords in the left hand threatened to enervate the right-hand theme. Then, in the trio, anxiety gave way to grace, as if the pianist had finally found his way inside the music. The tone turned liquid, an arpeggio became an aria, and time stopped. Anderszewski succeeded in sustaining momentum at a daringly slow tempo—the kind of effect that Sviatoslav Richter made his specialty. When the first theme returned, the urge to deconstruct had been exorcised, and the lyric spell was unbroken to the end.

Anderszewski is one of several younger pianists that Carnegie Hall is showcasing in Zankel this season. Till Fellner, who made a lucid and songful recording of Bach's "Well-Tempered Clavier" for the ECM label, played a recital in December, and, if he seemed temperamentally ill-suited to the grandiose Liszt B-Minor Sonata, he was thoroughly at home in Bach's Fifth French Suite. Jonathan Biss appears at Zankel on March 8th. He is a formidable musician who exerts a subtle intellectual pressure on seemingly straight-ahead readings of the classical and Romantic repertory. Paul Lewis, Alessio Bax, and the composer-pianists Fazil Say and Lera Auerbach are others who might thrive in Zankel's music-of-the-future atmosphere.

Even with Zankel in the mix, it's no easier to get to Carnegie Hall. Hundreds of gifted pianists emerge from conservatories each year, and the major concert venues cannot accommodate them all. The more resourceful players are discovering that entrepreneurship is no artistic sin. Daniel Beliavsky, a doctoral student at N.Y.U., has begun making recordings for the Internet-based label Sonatabop. He favors sumptuous textures and swaying tempos, harking back to the Russian tradition: his heavy rubato in the Schubert Impromptus probably made his teachers blanch. Indeed, on bonus tracks to his CDs, Beliavsky carries on amusing dialogues with an austere pedagogue named Ulysses Kidgi, who preaches "anonymous perfection." Kidgi is a figment of Beliavsky's imagination, but his pedantry is all too true to life. Beliavsky is also a composer, and the première performance of his piece "The Animals Race!" will take place on March 9th, at Merkin Hall.

Soheil Nasseri, a native of Santa Monica, California, has garnered a few enthusiastic reviews, as well as a story chronicling his adventures in downtown night life. (A classical guy who hangs out with hip-hop promoters—freaky!) But he can't attract attention at the big agencies that dominate the touring circuit. In the fall, he rented Alice Tully Hall to play five Beethoven sonatas; passing moments of insecurity were offset by warm, elegant, unaffected musicianship. To fill his days, Nasseri has been immersing himself in an ambitious music-education project, playing Beethoven sonatas in schools all over the city. He may lack the big recital dates, but he has what other pianists only dream of: fresh-faced, fascinated audiences almost every day of the week. ♦

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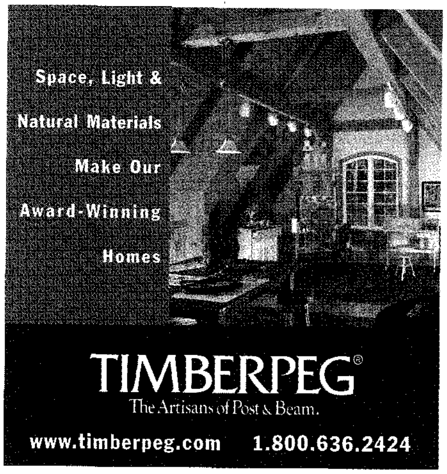
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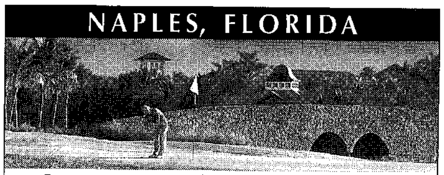
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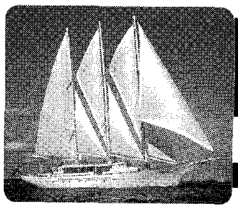
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THE CURRENT CINEMA

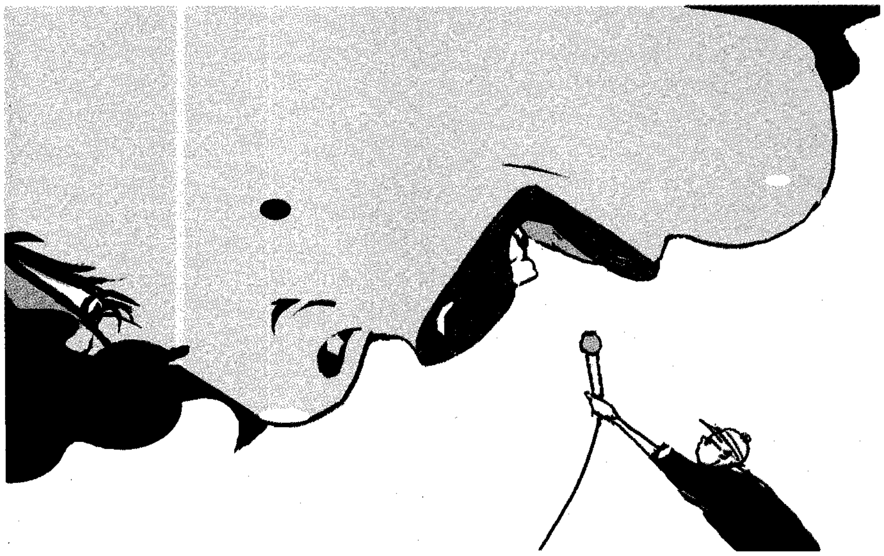
ORAL VALUES

"Inside Deep Throat."

BY ANTHONY LANE

"Deep Throat" was a sixty-one-minute film, released in 1972. It was directed by Gerard Damiano, whom even French critics would struggle to classify as an auteur. He had been a hairdresser, before making the tediously traditional leap from blow-drying to pornography. Damiano also claims to have written the script of "Deep Throat" over a weekend, although I suspect that he got up late on Saturday, started writing, and was done before brunch. The star of the movie was Linda Lovelace, who plays a woman named Linda Lovelace. This Method-like combustion of performer and role was understood to have searing implications for society's grasp of the real, although one might equally suggest that, given what Linda did best, and given the gourmandise with which she did it, it was asking too much of the poor woman that she pretend to be somebody else at the same time.

The plot of "Deep Throat" concerns Linda's courtly quest for the white knight, or knights, who will go to any lengths to meet her unorthodox needs. There is a curious scene, early in the film, during which Linda and her roommate Helen (Dolly Sharp), who looks like Rita Moreno with jet lag, sit beside a swimming pool and develop a touch of the Bovarys. "Helen, there's got to be more to life than just screwing around," Linda says. I perked up at this point, wondering what alternative enrichment the pair might seek; would Linda try ceramics, perhaps? Could she and Helen tour the great Gothic cathedrals of Western Europe? Sadly, the cure for screwing around turns out to be more screwing around, with the volume turned up. In Linda's words, "There should be bells ringing, dams bursting, bombs going off." Damiano is so pleased with this line that Linda is forced to repeat it throughout the film; for those who still don't get the point (pornography, like high-school poetry, has both a weakness for metaphor and a terror that the message might not get through), he waits until the climactic moment and then sprinkles the action with shots of ringing bells. There are no dams bursting, but the budget of "Deep Throat" was only twenty-five thousand dollars, so, unless Damiano could rig up something fancy in his bathtub, dams were out.



The movie earned some six hundred million dollars. Needless to say, Damiano got the crumbs. The bulk of the cash—and it was literally cash, collected from theatres around the country by yes-men—dropped into the pockets of the Mob. Such are the claims, at any rate, that are aired by "Inside Deep Throat," a documentary that takes us nimbly through the story of the movie's notoriety. We are introduced to everybody concerned, right up to Adolf Hitler. (Adolf was Lovelace's cat, with a perfect mustache of black fur under his nose. In stills, he looks unimpressed by the whole affair. He may have been a Republican.) We are guided through the shooting of "Deep Throat," the modish allure that clung to it, and the efforts of the courts and the Nixon Administration to squeeze the life out of it. Harry Reems, the lead actor, was even prosecuted in Memphis, Tennessee, for breaking obscenity laws. This was like giving Pinocchio five years in the pen for being made of wood.

The hook of "Deep Throat" is that Linda's throat turns out, under medical inspection, to house her clitoris—a word that several contributors to the documentary, including Hugh Hefner, pronounce on the second syllable. I found this strangely troubling. For a few seconds, indeed, I misheard dear old Hef and found myself wondering why the site of all sexual pleasure should be a tourist. Was this some wistful backward glance to the glamorous globe-trot of the pre-AIDS era? Would the makers of "Inside Deep Throat," Fenton Bailey and Randy Barbato, get to interview the tourist in question? No such luck. We have to settle for a predictable roster of guest preachers: Camille Paglia, Norman Mailer, Erica Jong, Gore Vidal, Larry Flynt, Alan Dershowitz, and a bundle of simpers and tics with the words "Helen Gurley Brown" written underneath. Far more enjoyable are the crew from the original picture, who are, without exception, on loan from the pages of a Carl Hiaasen novel. Connoisseurs of fruitcake will treasure Ron Wertheim, the production manager, whose vivid gray locks burst outward like solar flares, and who is plainly looking forward to being reunited, in the near future, with his own mind. Moving on, we come to Lenny Camp, the location manager, who cups one ear at the interviewer and describes "Deep Throat" as "a piece-of-shit film." Plus, "the actors are all shit." I would second Lenny in his thoughtful analysis, adding merely that, if you think the actors are shit, you should try the editing. And the lighting. And the sound recording. And the sex.

Webster's Dictionary defines pornography as a depiction of behavior "intended to cause sexual excitement," and by that standard "Deep Throat" fails in its task. The movie is numbly, grindingly, trouser-saggingly dull. If you want arousal, get in your car and drive very slowly over a speed bump. The notion that Damiano was aiming at comedy is scuppered once you realize that the comic scenes—Harry Reems as the doctor, say, with his silly shrink's accent—are roughly as amusing as trench foot. Even more ill-founded were the efforts to cast Linda Lovelace as a feminist pioneer; from a distance, the fantasy of a woman deriving her sharpest satisfaction from the most slavish act of man-pleasing seems more, not less, like something that only a man would dream up. Feminist invective, to its credit, swung against "Deep Throat," powered largely by Lovelace's own account of the film's execution in her 1980 book, "Ordeal." Whether you believe her or not, there is no gainsaying the number of women (infinitely greater these days, because of the Internet) who are hustled and hijacked into the rumpus room of pornography. "Inside Deep Throat" offers few inklings of that persuasive grimness, except for a difficult sequence with Patsy Carroll, a school friend of Linda's, who saw the film, went home, and wept. "I just felt like someone I loved had died," she says.

The sleaziest aspect of "Inside Deep Throat" is its desperation to make a big noise out of a pip-squeak. From the opening credits, in the course of which Camille Paglia recalls "an epochal moment in the history of modern sexuality," to the closing homage, in which our narrator, Dennis Hopper, tells us that " 'Deep Throat' was less about the joys of oral sex than it was about the freedom to speak out against shame and hypocrisy," we are dragged through a glossily packaged exercise in cultural aggrandizement, as immovable in its prejudice as the forces of religious reaction which it yearns to provoke. There is even a hilarious attempt, near the end, to argue that the good old days of pornography used to brim with Ambrosian innocence, after which, Erica Jong says, "a very cynical pornographic industry came in on the heels of the First Amendment, and began coining money, hand over fist." Leaving aside her interesting choice of image, I take it that she is referring to the "bad" money made in our corrupt post-Reagan age, as opposed to the "good" money made by all the Mafia goons thirty years ago or more. I'm sorry, but "Deep Throat" really *was* about the joys of oral sex, and from where I was sitting they didn't even look that joyful. To trumpet its progress as if it were Baudelaire's "Les Fleurs du Mal" or "Lady Chatterley's Lover," or, for that matter, "Last Tango in Paris," which premièred later the same year, is to shrink the potency of art and to invest in the monopoly of junk.

It is now clear that what mattered, in 1972, was not so much seeing "Deep Throat" as saying that you had seen "Deep Throat." In so doing, you bid farewell to any traces of inhibition that hung slack around your soul and equipped yourself to join in the bracing new conversation on which society had embarked. The possibility that such conversation was no less likely to bore and stultify than what came before would, of course, not occur to the makers of "Inside Deep Throat," who are so enamored of "porno chic" (as it was then labelled in the *Times*) that they fail to recognize it as just another brand of self-obsession. The one thing we can say for certain of "adult" entertainment is that it is never adult; in its very eagerness to fence off sexual abandonment from other forms of lived experience, it betrays its origins in the hearts of the perpetually and perspiringly adolescent. As a caustic Norman Mailer remarks, "The worst thing to be said about us Americans is that we sell our souls for a giggle." You may declare yourself groovily attuned to the liberties afforded by pornography (remember Warren Beatty and Jack Nicholson standing shoulder to shoulder with Harry Reems), or you may rush to enshrine your distaste for it in frightened legislation, but you are falling into the same trap. The thousands who congratulated themselves on their ruttish bravado, simply by virtue of having seen a trashy little flick in Times Square, were no less deluded than the millions who fell away in strangulated horror at the revelation, during the Super Bowl broadcast of 2004, that Janet Jackson, in her capacity as a female mammal, possessed a nipple. "Deep Throat" bore an X certificate. "Inside Deep Throat" is an NC-17. Neither is suitable for grownups. ♦

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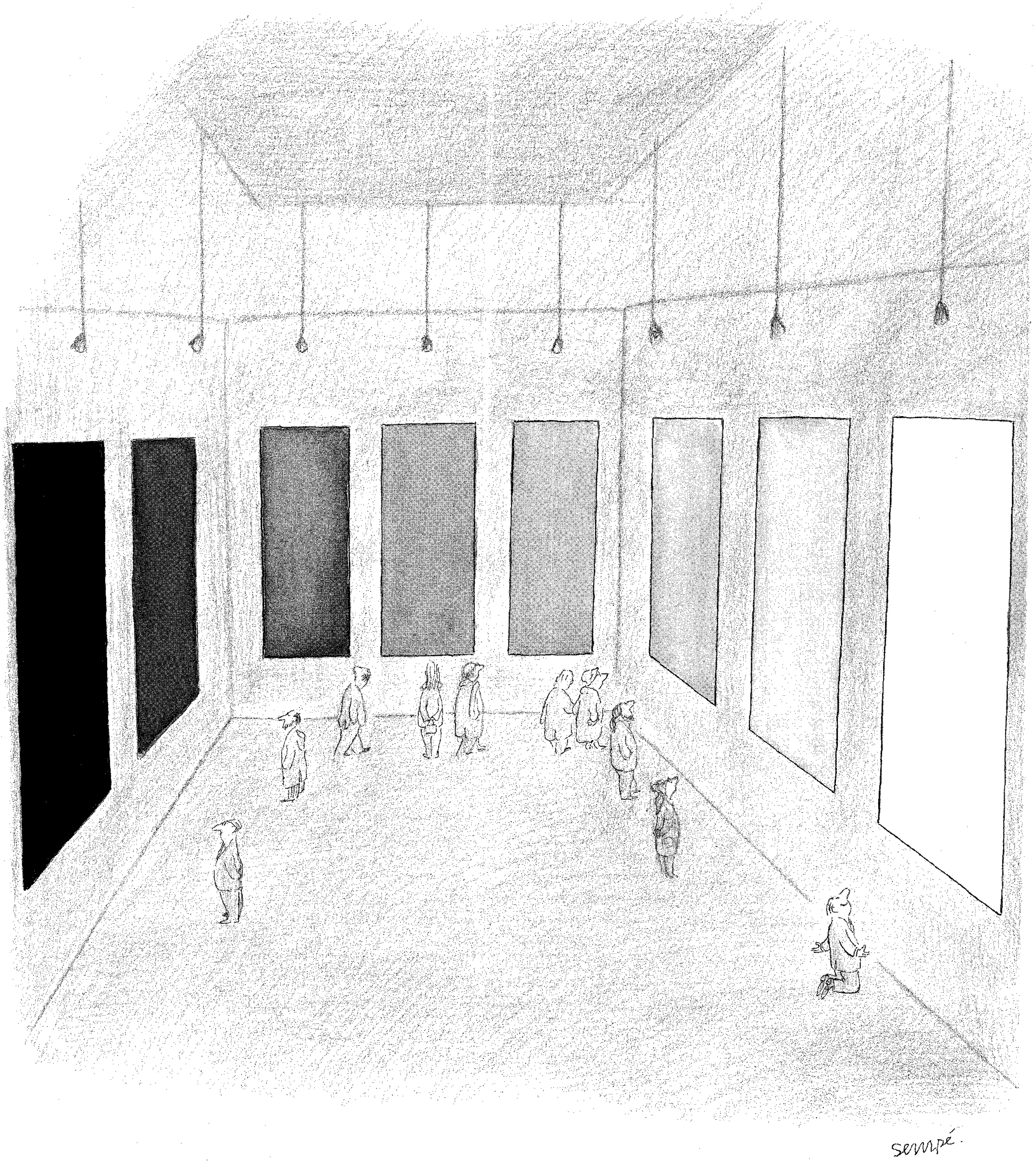

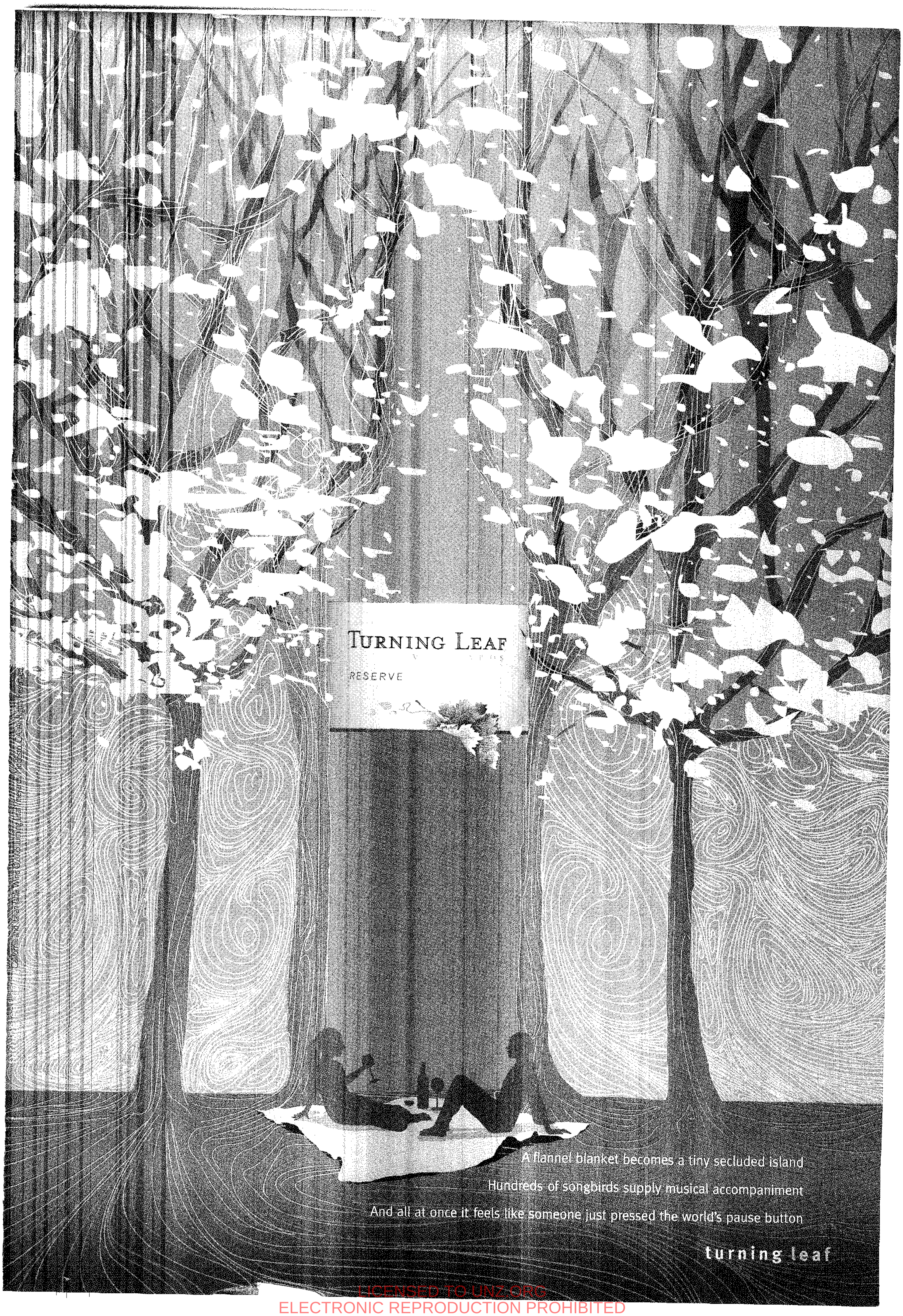

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